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# **Teacher Education through Distance Mode: The Nepalese Experience**

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**M. Ed, M.A. (Distinction), MRes**

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

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## **Abstract**

Distance education has been recognised around the world as a viable and cost-effective method for the initial training of teachers, and for their continuing professional development. In Nepal, one teacher training college has been offering a teacher education course through distance mode. In this regard, the main objective of this study was to seek a deeper understanding of the programme and to determine its overall quality. To achieve this, the research utilised a case study methodology and explored the experiences and reactions of students, tutors/founder members on this B.Ed. programme. To systematically assess the programme's effectiveness, the research developed a new analytical framework appropriate for this context. The framework was further refined as data were analysed.

The study revealed that the quality of Self-Learning-Materials provided were poor in terms of content presentation, coverage, student-content interaction, and in encouraging distance students in learning. While the poor quality of the materials was partly due to inadequate finances, it was also due to a lack of expertise and training in distance learning materials development.

The distance approach introduced by the college was highly appreciated by students, but the study revealed that the context in which the college worked had impeded development. Initiatives were constrained by several issues, such as the college and its study centres operating with minimal physical infrastructure and logistics, poor learning resources and inadequate staffing. The college and university management and administration was inefficient in supporting its students and staff. Study findings indicate that the quality of the programme was undermined by several factors such as political instability, absence of government support, insufficient finances, poor infrastructure, management incompetence, a lack of adequately trained staff, and shortage of expertise in distance learning.



The findings suggest that the quality and sustainability of the programme could be ensured through political commitment, government support, staff development and training, use of communication technology, collaborative partnerships and the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms.

This study makes a unique contribution to the field of teacher education through distance mode by exploring its effectiveness in Nepal, and brings to light the complexities and challenges of distance education in a politically unstable, under-resourced and development context.

## **Acknowledgements**

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I would like to acknowledge all the participants who took part in this study for their time and input. Although due to ethical issues, the real name of the college has been anonymised in this research, I am extremely grateful to all the college and local study centre authorities, study centre co-ordinators and staff for helping make this study possible.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>B.Ed.</b>	<b>Bachelor of Education</b>
<b>BirMet</b>	<b>Bir Metropolitan University</b>
<b>B.S.</b>	<b>Bikram Sambat (official calendar of Nepal)</b>
<b>CA</b>	<b>Constitutional Assembly</b>
<b>CBS</b>	<b>Central Bureau of Statistics</b>
<b>CDC</b>	<b>Curriculum Development Centre</b>
<b>CDET</b>	<b>College of Distance Education and Training</b>
<b>CERID</b>	<b>Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development</b>
<b>COL</b>	<b>Commonwealth of Learning</b>
<b>CoP</b>	<b>Community of Practice</b>
<b>CPA</b>	<b>Comprehensive Peace Accord</b>
<b>CPINES</b>	<b>Current Practices and Issues in Nepalese Education System</b>
<b>CPN-M</b>	<b>Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)</b>
<b>CPN-UML</b>	<b>Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist)</b>
<b>DEC</b>	<b>Distance Education Centre</b>
<b>DEOLD</b>	<b>Distance Education and Open Learning Division</b>
<b>DFID</b>	<b>Department for International Development</b>

<b>DoE</b>	<b>Department of Education</b>
<b>EFA-NPA</b>	<b>Education for All National Plan of Action</b>
<b>ELT</b>	<b>English Language Teaching</b>
<b>ETC</b>	<b>Education Training Centre</b>
<b>FoE</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>GBP</b>	<b>Great Britain Pound</b>
<b>HEI</b>	<b>Higher Education Institution</b>
<b>HPMEC</b>	<b>Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee</b>
<b>HRW</b>	<b>Human Rights Watch</b>
<b>HSEB</b>	<b>Higher Secondary Education Board</b>
<b>HSLC</b>	<b>Higher School Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>ICT</b>	<b>Information and Communication Technology</b>
<b>I.Ed.</b>	<b>Intermediate Education</b>
<b>IMS</b>	<b>Information Management System</b>
<b>IoE</b>	<b>Institute of Educaiton</b>
<b>IQA</b>	<b>Internal Quality Assurance</b>
<b>ITQ</b>	<b>In-Text Question</b>
<b>LLP</b>	<b>Legitimate Peripheral Participation</b>

<b>MCQ</b>	<b>Multiple Choice Question</b>
<b>MoE</b>	<b>Ministry of Education</b>
<b>NC</b>	<b>Nepali Congress</b>
<b>NCED</b>	<b>National Centre for Educational Development</b>
<b>NELTA</b>	<b>Nepal English Language Teachers' Association</b>
<b>NFEC</b>	<b>Non-Formal Education Centre</b>
<b>NRS</b>	<b>Nepalese Rupees</b>
<b>NTA</b>	<b>Nepal Telecommunications Authority</b>
<b>OE</b>	<b>Open Education</b>
<b>ODE</b>	<b>Open and Distance Education</b>
<b>ODL</b>	<b>Open and Distance Learning</b>
<b>OUUK</b>	<b>Open University UK</b>
<b>PCL</b>	<b>Proficiency Certificate Level</b>
<b>PLA</b>	<b>People's Liberation Army</b>
<b>PPTTC</b>	<b>Private Primary Teacher Training Centre</b>
<b>QAA</b>	<b>Quality Assurance and Accreditation</b>
<b>RETPP</b>	<b>Radio Education Teacher Training Project</b>
<b>RP</b>	<b>Resource Person</b>

<b>SAQ</b>	<b>Self-Assessment Question</b>
<b>SLA</b>	<b>Second Language Acquisition</b>
<b>SLC</b>	<b>School Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>SLM</b>	<b>Self-Learning Material</b>
<b>SPA</b>	<b>Seven Party Alliance</b>
<b>SRQ</b>	<b>Secondary Research Question</b>
<b>SSRP</b>	<b>School Sector Reform Plan</b>
<b>TCoP</b>	<b>Teacher Community of Practice</b>
<b>TDPG</b>	<b>Teacher Development Policy Guideline</b>
<b>TEP</b>	<b>Teacher Education Project</b>
<b>TPC</b>	<b>Teacher Preparation Programme</b>
<b>TSC</b>	<b>Teacher Service Commission</b>
<b>TU</b>	<b>Tribhuvan University</b>
<b>UCPN-M</b>	<b>United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)</b>
<b>UGC</b>	<b>University Grants Commission</b>
<b>UK</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>
<b>UNDP</b>	<b>United Nations Development Programme</b>
<b>UNESCO</b>	<b>United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural, Organisation</b>

UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNMIN	United Nations Mission in Nepal
YCL	Young Communist League

# CHAPTER ONE: ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

There is increasing recognition that distance education<sup>1</sup> (henceforth DE) is fast becoming an accepted and indispensable part of mainstream educational systems, in both developed and developing countries, with particular emphasis in the latter (UNESCO, 2002a). UNESCO (2002b) states that DE is often the only means by which educational opportunities can be brought to remote areas, displaced or marginalised communities, or to unqualified prospective teachers requiring teaching qualifications. Nepal is a country where the aftermath of armed conflict (1996-2006) continues to ravage its population leaving many families homeless, displaced and psychologically scarred. In this regard, DE provision can benefit a variety of educationally deprived people and others located in remote and rural areas who do not have convenient access to higher education - young and adults, women, degree seekers, and other groups of people who were forced to discontinue their education due to the armed conflict. Additionally, it has been suggested that the DE system is appropriate for teacher training, and the flexibility of distance courses provides prospective teachers opportunities to obtain a teaching qualification, or for serving teachers to upgrade their qualifications without having to interrupt work or move away from their workplace (Moon et al., 2005). For this reason, DL

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions of the terms open learning, distance education, distance learning, and open and distance education are provided in Chapter Three (see section 3.2). It is important to note, however, that the B.Ed. course explored in this study was a distance education programme, but not 'open' as it required formal entry qualifications to study.

provisions are likely to increase access to teacher education, and may offer great potential for improving issues related to equity in Nepal.

Against this backdrop, this chapter presents my background, the background to the B.Ed. programme offered through distance mode in Nepal, rationales for the study, the research aims and objectives, and an outline of how this thesis is organised.

## **1.2 My adventure in the field of teacher education**

Born into a family of subsistence farmers in a remote village in mid-western Nepal, where higher secondary or college education was not available locally (the village is not yet connected by road and electricity), like many others, I had to leave the village and go to an urban area to continue my education at higher secondary level. As my parents could not afford accommodation costs or college fees, I was expected to work while studying. My career in teaching began at the same time my I. Ed. (Intermediate in Education) in English Language Teaching (ELT) commenced, at one of the face-to-face teaching campuses, affiliated to Tribhuvan University (TU), in a town a day's travel from my home. Although I was just beginning my teacher certification course, I was fortunate to find a full-time teaching job at a private boarding school. My responsibilities were not only teaching but also included looking after residential students before and after the school day. It was virtually impossible, therefore, for me to attend regular face-to-face classes on campus. I collected lecture notes from friends, relied on books available in the market and studied mostly on my own until I completed my B.Ed. degree. Had there been a course for prospective teachers, this would have been my first choice.

I worked as an English teacher in Nepal for over eight years, teaching students ranging from pre-primary to higher secondary level. During my academic journey and career, my attention



was drawn towards English language pedagogies and the learning and teaching of English as a foreign or international language, and I decided to explore the field further. After completing my M.Ed. from TU in 2004, I studied for an M.A. in *International ELT and Applied Language Studies* in the UK. While doing the course, I acquired more knowledge about and became more familiar with issues surrounding ELT practices around the world. Although I was interested in distance learning and teaching since I was at college, as I discuss in section 1.4 below, in recent years, my interest has been in teacher education through distance mode, both in developed and developing countries. Next, I go on to provide background information to the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal which was the focus of this study.

### **1.3 The distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal**

Teacher education programmes in Nepal are provided through a variety of organisational arrangements. Pre-service teacher education is offered, particularly, through major universities or teacher education colleges whereas in-service teacher education programmes are mainly regulated by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED). For example, 3-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), and 2-year Masters of Education (M.Ed.) degrees are offered by universities for prospective teachers, or for teachers seeking further qualifications, whereas a 1-year B.Ed. qualification is available for graduates who have a bachelor's or higher degree from a recognised university.

The programme explored in this study was a DL teacher certification course aimed at prospective teachers. The programme was delivered by the College of Distance Education and Training (CDET), affiliated to Bir Metropolitan University<sup>2</sup> (henceforth, BirMet). As I discuss

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<sup>2</sup> The names of the college and university have been anonymised

in the next chapter, while teacher training through distance mode in Nepal started in 1957, currently the CDET, a privately managed college, is the sole institution in the country offering a distance B.Ed. programme. During the academic year 2008/09, the college enrolled 354 student teachers and out of them 26 were female (UGC, 2009). The BirMet is responsible for the monitoring of the programme, conducting examinations and providing awards, whereas CDET is responsible for student enrolment, course and Self-Learning-Materials development and production, study centre monitoring, conducting tutorials, providing support at the local level, and conducting internal assessments.

The main mission of CDET is to provide a route for graduates, who already hold a bachelor's degree in relevant subjects and want to enter the teaching profession, but require teaching qualifications and a teaching license. Additionally, another objective of the programme is to help pre-service teachers develop and acquire theoretical knowledge, practical skills and other strategies associated with teaching a specific school subject. The programme aims to widen educational opportunities for prospective teachers in rural and remote parts of the country, and for other individuals to obtain a teaching qualification whilst continuing to work full-time.

This B.Ed. programme employs Self-Learning Materials (SLMs), accompanied by 3-day long face-to-face contact session tutorials about every three months. These tutorials are held at CDET study centres. Teaching practice is mandatory. Supervision of teaching practice in schools is carried out by educators from local higher education institutions. However, the specialisation subject School Management and Supervision (SMS), being a practicum course, did not have a teaching practice component, but instead required the students to produce a school survey report. Students were required to face a viva for their practicum.

Learner support was provided through the study centres across the country by phone, email (where available), or face-to-face. The support system comprised locally-based tutors, and

centre coordinators or Resource Persons (RP). CDET provided training opportunities on several subjects such as SMS, English Language Teaching (ELT), Mathematics Teaching, Science Teaching, Population and Health Education and Social Studies.

**Table 1: The distance B.Ed. programme components**

<b>Subjects</b>		<b>Marks Allocation</b>	<b>Assessment Provision</b>
<b>Core</b>	Educational psychology	100 marks	20 % internal/TMA
	Foundations of education	100 marks	20% internal/TMA
	Curriculum development	100 marks	20% internal/TMA
	Current Practices and Issues of Nepalese Education System	50 marks	100% practical
<b>Specialisation</b>	Specialisation I	100 marks	20 % internal/TMA
	Specialisation II	100 marks	20% internal/TMA
	Teaching Practice, or Action research	100 marks	100% practical

As illustrated in the table above, every theoretical subject contained a 20% internal evaluation provision and students were assessed based on their attendance in contact sessions, participation on inductions and orientations, presentations during tutorials, and quality of assignments submitted at the contact sessions. The end-of-course written examination was given 80% weightage and the BirMet conducted the formal written examination as per its rules and regulations. The programme included two practical subjects, a core subject the Current Practices and Issues of Nepalese School Education (CPINSE), which required students to write a report on issues and problems of Nepalese school systems, and a specialisation subject requiring supervised teaching practice (e.g., English Language Teaching), or review of research documents (e.g., School Management and Supervision).

## **1.4 Rationale for the research**

As pointed out earlier, this research was motivated by the lack of research in teacher education through distance mode in the context of Nepal and by a long-standing personal interest in learning and teaching at a distance as well as my academic background. First, I chose CDET as a research site because the distance teacher education in a developing context was a topic of interest in its own right. Second, since the distance B.Ed. course in Nepal is a fairly recent phenomenon, I decided to undertake the present study in order to gain a fuller understanding of it. There is a paucity of research on teacher education through distance mode in Nepal, and so far no studies on the relevance and effectiveness of the B.Ed. programme had been carried out. In this context, the intent in conducting this investigation was to develop an increased understanding of tutors' and prospective teachers' experiences of and reactions to the B.Ed. course. It is believed that students' and tutors' perspectives may offer valuable insights towards improving the programme, and may be informing the DE policy making and practice in Nepal. Since the Nepalese government has proposed and is planning to provide teacher training at all levels via distance mode, and also intends to establish an Open University, the findings of the study may also be used to inform the policy making process, and further planning and development of the DL courses for teacher education and training.

Third, as a teacher educator having studied at the conventional Tribhuvan University, and while pursuing my doctorate at The Open University UK (OUUK), I became more interested in the role, if at all, DL provision could play in expanding access to teacher training opportunities to the wider population in Nepal, who would otherwise be unable to attend programmes on-campus for reasons, such as the remoteness of Himalayan terrain, other geographical barriers, low economic status, family and job commitments, and political unrest. Hence, DE system in

Nepal has been a topic for my professional concern. The study has the following aims and objectives.

## **1.5 Research aims and objectives**

The broad objective of this study is to examine how students and tutors involved in the distance B.Ed. course in Nepal describe their experiences, and to explore issues, challenges and problems faced by them while operating in a politically unstable and under-resourced context.

This research has four broad aims:

1. To devise a framework to explore the effectiveness of the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal;
2. To apply the framework to investigate the students' and tutors' perspectives on and experiences of the B.Ed. programme at CDET in Nepal;
3. To identify constraints, problems, and challenges faced by students, tutors and CDET administrative members;
4. To gather empirical information and provide recommendations for the improvement of the programme.

It may be important to note that since SLMs were the predominant method of course delivery, one of the secondary research questions particularly focused on the quality<sup>3</sup> of the study materials. Therefore, the following interrelated research questions were formulated as a means

---

3 Quality can be viewed as exceptional, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money, and as transformative (Harvey and Green, 1993). In this research, I view quality as 'fitness for purpose' which may be determined by students' and tutors' reactions to, and satisfaction with, the distance B.Ed. programme.

of eliciting students' and tutors' descriptions of their experiences and perspectives of the B.Ed. course in Nepal.

### **1.5.1 Primary Research question:**

What insights can be gained from the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors involved in the distance B.Ed. programme at CDET in Nepal? How can the B.Ed. programme be made more effective?

### **1.5.2 Secondary questions:**

- a. What do students and tutors say about the nature of the course and quality of Self-Learning Materials (SLMs)?
- b. What are the experiences and views of the students regarding educational infrastructure and learning resources, administration and management of the programme, student support and face-to-face tutorial sessions, and student assessment system?
- c. What are the experiences and views of the tutors regarding educational infrastructure and learning resources, administration and management of the programme, contact session tutorials and student support, and staff development and training opportunities?
- d. What are the main factors that facilitate or hinder distance teacher education in Nepal?

## **1.6 Organisation of the thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, I provide overviews of the historical and political context, and explore the education system, including the historical development and contemporary status of DL provision for teacher preparation and training in Nepal. I felt that

in order to gain a fuller picture of students' and tutors' experiences of distance learning and teaching at CDET, contextual understanding and challenges of the situation in which DE is embedded is essential.

In Chapter Three, I present a review of literature relevant to this study such as theories of DE, and benchmarks and guidelines for assessing the quality of DE programmes. Based on the literature review, I also devised a framework, which provided a basis for analysing my data.

Chapter Four focuses on my research methodology. It provides rationales for, and the limitations of, the case study approach as well as details of data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. This chapter also provides details of the practical issues I encountered while undertaking this research and includes a discussion on research ethics pertaining to my research.

In Chapter Five, I report the perspectives of students and tutors on the quality of SLMs linking their views with literature on DL materials development and production.

Chapter Six explores students' experiences of studying the distance B.Ed. course, and presents issues and concerns raised by them.

Chapter Seven explores the views and experiences of tutors on various aspects of the B.Ed. course, their motivation for undertaking the course, infrastructure and resources, management and administrative services, assessment and feedback mechanisms, and tutorials and the student support system.

Chapter Eight draws together the perspectives of students and tutors. Based on my fieldwork, and experiences and views of the students, I discuss and identify some of the key factors that facilitate or hinder the distance teacher education programme in a developing country like Nepal.

In the final chapter, the findings of the study are summarised. The chapter also outlines lessons learned, limitations and contributions of the research, potential areas for further research, and finally describes my learning as a researcher and as a teacher educator.



# **CHAPTER TWO: THE NATIONAL, POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN NEPAL**

## **2.1 Introduction**

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (hereafter Nepal), is a landlocked, poor mountainous country in South Asia, sandwiched between the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to its north and India to its south, east and west. Nepal has a total population of 26.6 million and the adult literacy rate is 56.6 per cent (female 45.5% and male 71.6%) (CBS, 2011).

Economically, Nepal remains one of the developing countries in the world (per capita of USD 440 per annum). The poverty is entrenched by centuries-long political instability, poor governance, low economic growth, inadequate developmental and educational infrastructure, social inequalities and exclusion due to numerous other disparities such as geographic diversity (UNDP, 2002). Education through distance mode, which is emerging as a cost-effective and indispensable part of mainstream education, can contribute to social, educational, and economic development in a developing country like Nepal (UNESCO, 2002a). However, during my fieldwork, despite the fact that Nepal has abundant water resources and hydroelectricity potential, the country was suffering from up to 18-hour power cuts (known as ‘load-shedding’<sup>4</sup>) per day, which has affected business and educational organisations. As will be discussed later in Chapter Four, the unreliable electricity supply, and the power cuts, affected my research planning and fieldwork.

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<sup>4</sup> It refers to planned electric power cuts in certain geographical areas, particularly when electricity demand is higher than the supply.

Nepal has undergone a radical social and political transformation since 2006. It has officially managed to end a decade-long armed conflict, abolished a 240-year long monarchy and declared itself a secular democratic republican state. However, chronic political instability and uncertainty, a growing culture of 'Banda'<sup>5</sup>, security concerns and socio-economic challenges continue to exist in the country. The Nepalese contemporary education context, and problems and challenges it is facing, therefore, cannot be explained satisfactorily without understanding the historical and contemporary political situation of Nepal. Additionally, since this research is informed by naturalistic-interpretive approaches, there is a need to understand the context in which CDET is operating and in which it is embedded. Exploration of the historical and socio-political situation may also provide an understanding of the educational development in the country, help recognise the impact of political crisis on education and identify key challenges of DE in Nepal. Hence, next follows an overview of the historical and political context of Nepal.

## **2.2 Nepal: A historical and political background**

Prithvi Narayan Shah, after the conquest and consolidation of numerous competing petty principalities, proclaimed himself the king of Nepal and declared Kathmandu the capital of unified Nepal in 1769 (Bhattarai, 2008). In 1846, following a massacre of palace courtiers, Jung Bahadur Rana seized political power from the then king, Rajendra Bikram Shah, and assumed control of the country as the first of the hereditary Rana Prime Ministers. The Ranas did not abolish monarchy but the kings were made titular rulers during the 104 years of the Rana regime. Ranas kept the country isolated from the rest of the world, discouraged

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<sup>5</sup> A form of protest and general strike which often means closing down of markets in a city, or area, for a day, and with some Bandas grinding the entire country to a halt. There have been instances of Banda lasting for weeks.

development and mobilisation, and brutality repressed dissent (Lawoti, 2007). Nepal made very little progress during this period.

In 1951, King Tribhuvan, formed an alliance with the Nepali Congress (NC) party that was a leading mass movement against the tyrannical Rana rule, and proclaimed a constitutional monarchy (Erckel, 2008). The Interim Constitution, entitled *Interim Government of Nepal Act 1951*, was declared to streamline the new political transition until the promulgation of a new constitution. Following years of political instability, Nepal experienced the first parliamentary election in 1959. However, amid growing conflict between the palace and the newly elected Prime Minister B.P Koirala, King Mahendra, through a 'royal coup' in 1960, abrogated the parliament, seized all powers of the government, vested sovereignty in the king, banned political parties and arrested the prime minister and other ministers and declared a constitution in 1962 and introduced "*a partyless Panchayat democracy*"<sup>6</sup>, a pseudo-democratic system of government. The 30-year Panchayat regime ended in 1990 when the popular *Jana Andolan* (the people's movement), led by major political parties, succeeded in restoring multiparty democracy.

### **2.2.1 The democratic transition**

Following the popular *Jana Andolan* of 1990, the then king Birendra accepted the verdict to relinquish power, and formed an interim coalition government, which promulgated a new democratic constitution in November 1990. After the general election in 1991, a new

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6 Panchayat (or council) system operated in a four-tiered pyramid: hundreds of Gaun or village Panchayat, 75 Jilla or district Panchayats, 14 Anchal or zonal Panchayats, one Rastriya Panchayat or national assembly. Under this system, general elections were held for local council only, and these council members elected members of the district Panchayat, which in turn elected representatives to the National Panchayat. The King appointed the Prime Minister, and ministers were appointed on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

democratic government was formed but in mid-1994, the elected parliament was dissolved by King Birendra and a mid-term election was announced for November 1994. The election resulted in a hung parliament, and CPN-UML formed a minority coalition government. However, due to the failure of democratic governments to deliver real improvement in people's lives, a faction of radical communists renounced participation in the election (Whelpton, 2005). In 1995, the radical communists formed a party, called *Communist Party of Nepal- Maoist* (CPN-M), and went underground. The party did not take part in the general election conducted in 1999, either.

It may be important to note that democratic governments after the 1990s failed to address the needs and aspirations of people, and ignored the key priorities of national development such as political stability, good governance, socio-economic reforms, assurance of peace and security, and inclusion of various marginalised groups such as Dalit<sup>7</sup>, indigenous communities, and women in decision making and nation building. Political parties concentrated only on the creation of political superstructures so as to meet the political requirements of democratic governance, and they clamoured for control of parliament with a multitude of coalitions grappling for power (Kreuttner, 2009). The increasing culture of rampant corruption, political nepotism and various forms of impunity (e.g., related to corruption, political protection to criminals, human right abuse, VAT or tax evading) seem to have become entrenched in Nepalese society.

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<sup>7</sup> Dalit means 'the oppressed', traditionally so-called 'Achhut' or untouchable social groups.

### **2.2.2 The emergence of the Maoist insurgency**

Considering the fact that the issues of poverty and destitution, severe economic disparities, unemployment, widespread corruption, social discrimination and exclusion, and political segregation could not be solved within the existing old political system (Manandhar, 2010), CPN-M party now known as United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) or UCPN-M, henceforth, the Maoists, declared a guerrilla-style war '*Jana Yuddha*' (People's War) on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1996. The Maoists received substantial support from those groups who were historically marginalised, socially discriminated against, politically excluded, economically impoverished, and geographically isolated. From the beginning of *Jana Yuddha*, the Maoists promised to fight corruption, advocated educational reform and equal access to education, and promised land to landless peasants, which gave various poor, underprivileged and marginalised groups reason to believe that their demands and interests would be addressed by a Maoist-led government (Manandhar and Seddon, 2010).

The Maoists were very calculated in terms of strategic plans to obtain their desired goals. Hence, apart from the People's Revolution Army (PLA), the Maoists also established a semi-combatant organisation of unemployed youth, called the Young Communist League (YCL), and other organisations such as student wings, workers associations and ethnic organisations to support the revolution. Furthermore, despite the widespread criticism and objections of political parties, by December 2009, the Maoists unilaterally declared 13 ethnic and regional based autonomous states across the country, as per their state re-structuring model, in an attempt to boost support for their vision of federalism (Housden, 2010).

### **2.2.3 The royal takeover**

In November 2001, in response to the series of attacks by the Maoists, the government imposed a state of emergency in the country, declared the Maoists a terrorist organisation and deployed

the Nepal Army to fight against them (Hutt, 2004). Despite the government's crackdown, the Maoists insurgency grew rapidly and spread to most parts of the country. Law and order deteriorated so much that the government was not able to conduct the local or parliamentary elections scheduled for 13 November, 2002 (Lawoti, 2007). Government instability plagued the country after the restoration of democracy and from 1990s until 2002, Nepal witnessed 12 governments many of which were fragile coalitions. Amid a growing political crisis, in October, 2002, King Gyanendra dissolved the elected government, and assumed full executive power.

The 'royal' government was also unsuccessful in establishing peace and security in the country, or of conducting local elections. The monarchy had experienced hard times since the Royal Massacre of 2001, in which the crown prince murdered the King, Queen and many other members of the royal family. During the years 2002 to 2003, the King dismissed three Prime Ministers before assuming absolute power in January 2005 by imposing a state of emergency and suspending all democratic rights. The King lost the support of political parties and people. The King's takeover prompted the major mainstream parties first to join together in a seven-party alliance (SPA), and subsequently begin talks with the Maoists producing the historic 12-point understanding on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2005. The agreement contained the commitment to fighting together to abolish the absolute monarchy, establishing absolute democracy through the restoration of parliament, holding a CA assembly election by keeping the Maoists forces and royal army under the supervision of the United Nations among other strategies (Erckel, 2008).

#### **2.2.4 Abolition of monarchy and transition to a democratic republican state**

In April 2006, after a 19-day huge civil disobedience movement, known as *Jana Andolan-II*, against the King's direct rule, the King abandoned his stance and reinstated the 1999 House of

Representatives. In May, the seven-party alliance (SPA) formed a coalition government. On November 2006, the SPA leaders and the Maoists signed an historic Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), which formally ended the decade-long armed conflict. According to Amnesty International USA, during the insurgency and counter-insurgency more than 14,000 people lost their lives, tens of thousands were displaced from their villages, and both security forces and the Maoists cadres were involved in grave human rights abuses such as unlawful killings, detention, disappearance, abductions, and torture<sup>8</sup>. Nepal experienced a huge social, political, and economic crisis due to the Maoists insurgency and government counter-insurgency measures.

As per the CPA understanding, the Maoists agreed to join mainstream politics and have their armed forces monitored by the United Nations. Following the Nepal government request in July 2006, the UN established its political mission, United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in January 2007, with a mandate to support the peace process through independent monitoring of arms and armed personnel on both sides until the election of a Constituent Assembly. United Nations Mission in Nepal was also given the task of verifying the Maoists combatants and their arms. Out of 32,250 combatants, UNMIN verified 19,602 and some of them were disqualified as children (2,973 of them) and late recruits (HRW, 2011). As the government and its coalition partners believed that the newly formed Special Committee could take over responsibility for integrating and rehabilitating the PLA, UNMIN, after serving for four years, formally ended its mission in Nepal in January 2011. The Maoists party decided to hand over PLA, living in cantonments across the country with their weapons stored in iron containers, to the national army in April 2012.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/nepal>

Nepal adopted an Interim Constitution on 15 January 2007. The interim constitution initially decided to limit the membership of CA to 425 (202 from direct election, 204 nominated by parties on a proportional representation basis, and 16 nominated by the council of ministers). Conversely, in January 2007, Madhesi<sup>9</sup> parties started Madhesh<sup>10</sup> agitation (January-February 2007) demanding larger representation of people from Madhesh in the Constitutional Assembly. In order to address Madhesh and other Janajati (indigenous community) agitation, the interim constitution was amended to grant proportional representation in all state organisations to Madhesis, Dalit, ethnic groups, and other marginalised communities. Finally, the membership of Constitutional Assembly was increased to 604 (240 elected, 335 nominated on the basis of Proportional Representation, and 26 nominated by parliament based on consensus). In April 2007, the Maoists joined the interim government.

The long-awaited CA election was eventually held in April 2008. The Maoists, although not able to obtain a majority, established themselves as the largest party, winning more than one-third of CA seats. At the first meeting of the Constitutional Assembly on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2008, the members of CA voted to end monarchy, and declared Nepal a secular federal democratic republic. On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2008, the CA elected the first President of Nepal. As the largest party, the Maoists led a coalition government. As there was no two-third majority, with any political party, required to endorse any constitutional issues or bills, it was essential to develop a new culture of political consensus, mutual trust and confidence among leadership, and joint collaboration among the political parties to promulgate a new democratic constitution. Ignoring the prerequisite of consensus politics, major parties engaged in government making and

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9 A slippery term referring to people from Terai or southern region of Nepal

10 A loose term referring to some regional groups living in Terai



unmaking. Nepal has experienced four prime ministers and different coalition governments since the CA election and its dissolution. The four-year-old Constitutional Assembly, elected as an interim parliament to write a new constitution, was dissolved in May 2012 without promulgating the new constitution, as parties failed to agree on the model of federalism. The Maoist-led cabinet called for a fresh election on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012 but the government failed to hold self-declared election. Nepal continues to experience political crisis.

### **2.2.5 Looking to the future: hope, fear and challenges**

As stated above, Nepal has brought about momentous social and political transformation in the past few years. Despite these fundamental changes, little progress has been made since 2010, particularly due to the frequent changes of government, weak governance, and lack of progress on accountability for human rights violations, and slow implementation of political understanding and agreement made with various political, ethnic or other groups fighting for their rights (HRW, 2011). A dramatic improvement in governance, political consensus and accountability, and rule of law are essential for the creation of viable, responsive and inclusive democratic state in Nepal (Lawoti, 2007).

Although the Maoists movement was instrumental in raising the political consciousness of people in Nepal, they also left a serious blueprint in people's minds that through insurgency tactics such as Banda, coercion, intimidation, extortion, assaults, abduction and killings, one can pressure the government to address their demands (World Bank, 2011a). Various alliances of ethnic political groups, indigenous communities, and marginalised groups are all demanding greater representation and autonomous ethnic based federalism (Housden, 2010). Similarly, majority upper caste Bahun-Chhetri groups have also been launching demonstrations and strikes to put pressure on the government not to marginalise their rights in the new constitution. It is important to address the demands of historically marginalised and excluded groups in the

new constitution. While some groups argue that ethnic federalism can empower ethnic minorities, others fear that ethnicity-based federalism may exacerbate inter-ethnic and region-based conflict. Consequently, normal life in Nepal, for many days, was crippled by Banda and/or demonstrations before the CA was dissolved. Therefore, issues and concerns, still, remain about the impact of ethnic federalism on national unity, minority protection within ethnic federal states, and administrative functioning (World Bank, 2011a).

The culture of Nepal Banda and strikes has not only been crippling the economic situation of the country but also leading to vast gaps in the level of education due to the closure of educational institutions (Housden, 2010). During my fieldwork, Nepal Bandas were called by various political and non-political groups as a weapon to pressure the government to fulfil their demands. Encounters with 7-8 Bandas on average in a month used to be quite a common phenomenon at that time and some Bandas used to last longer. For example, once due to 'Nepal Banda' imposed by one of the major political parties, all cities, market places, educational institutions and even cyber-cafes were forced to close for more than a week.

Political instability (due to a naked power struggle for government making and unmaking), poor governance, corruption, and frequent Bandas seem to have negative impacts on the national, social, economic, and educational development in Nepal. In the next section, I explore Nepalese higher education, the use of open and distance approaches to teacher education and training, and the present status of teacher education through distance mode.

## **2.3 The Nepalese educational system**

Formal education in Nepal does not have a long history. It began with the establishment of an elementary English school, later commonly known as Darbar School, by the first Rana Prime Minister at his palace in 1853, but education in Darbar School was essentially limited to the

members of the Rana family, their relatives and the children of the bureaucratic elite. During the century long Rana oligarchy (1846-1950), two colleges (one general and one special technical), eleven high schools, and altogether 321 primary schools were established in the entire country, and the literacy rate was 2% (Perraton, 1993; Skinner and Holland, 1996). Formal education for the general masses was strictly restricted until end of the autocratic Rana regime in 1950, as the Rana rulers feared that an educated public may pose a threat to their hold on power, although, some members of high class families studied in India during this period. After the establishment of democracy in 1951, the education sector in Nepal made remarkable growth.

### **2.3.1 Structure of the Nepalese school education system**

Before the school year 2009, the national education system of Nepal was divided into five major stages:

- a. primary level (Grades 1-5),
- b. lower secondary (Grades 6-8),
- c. secondary (Grades 9-10),
- d. higher secondary (Grades 11-12) and,
- e. higher education (3-5 years bachelor's degrees, 2-year master's degrees, and doctorate degrees)

However, recently the government of Nepal has introduced a School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP 2009-2015), a long term strategic plan, in order to ensure equitable access to and quality of school education, to enhance quality and relevance of school education, and to strengthen institutional capacity for the effective delivery of educational services. The SSRP emphasises significant reform mainly in four areas such as the structure of education system, quality of service, school governance and investment management. The reform plan aims to restructure

the existing school system as *basic education* (consisting of Grades 1-8) and *secondary education* (consisting of Grades 9-12). The implementation of the SSRP was instigated in 2009/10 but since the integration and consolidation process of *basic education* is intended to be accomplished by 2012, and the restructuring of *secondary education* by 2015, the structure of 'old' school education system is still in operation. The successful completion of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination, conducted at the end of Grade 10, is a prerequisite for students to enter intermediate Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL)<sup>11</sup>, or higher secondary level (Grades 11 and 12) education. Thus, a total of twelve years of schooling is required for undertaking university education in Nepal.

The Department of Education (DoE), established under the Ministry of Education (MoE), is responsible for managing primary and secondary school education, and the higher secondary education is monitored and supervised by the Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) established in 1989. The HSEB is responsible for devising and implementing higher secondary education plans, for granting approval to higher secondary schools for developing and revising curricula, and for conducting examinations and awarding certificates.

### **2.3.2 Classification of schools by types and levels**

Both government and non-government (private) institutions of different types and standards are involved in providing education in Nepal. Educational institutions are mainly of two types: *public or community* and *private or institutional*. Community schools can be *community-aided*

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<sup>11</sup> Nepal government has decided to phase out PCL from the academic year 2010/11. The decision of the government triggered controversy, and students unions launched agitation against the decision arguing that many students would not be able to afford higher secondary education, mostly provided by private colleges. The TU, in particular, was providing intermediate level of education to a large number of students at affordable price.

(schools fully supported by the government for teachers' salaries and other expenses), *community-managed* (schools fully supported by the government for teachers' salaries and other funds but with their management responsibility lying with the community), and *community-unaided* (schools getting partial support or no support from the government). Although private education has become increasingly popular due to the perceived better quality of education, institutional schools charge high fees. The medium of education is mostly in Nepali at all levels of education, but some primary schools provide education in a region's mother tongue, and English is offered as a medium of instruction by most private institutions.

Following the Nepal government's EFA National Plan of Action (2001-2015), early childhood education (for 3-4 year-olds) is also offered through some school-based *pre-primary classes* (PPCs), and community-based *Early Child Development* (ECD) centres. There are also religious schools such as *Madrassa*, *Gumba/Vihar*, and *Gurukul*<sup>12</sup>. In order to reduce the number of 'out of school' children, however, and in pursuance of the spirit of Education for All, the government of Nepal has decided to mainstream these schools into national curriculum. The Table 2 below shows the total number of all types of community schools and institutional schools in the academic year 2010-11.

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<sup>12</sup>'Madrassa' denotes Mosque and is related to Islam. Both the words 'Gumba' and 'Vihar' denote 'monastery' and are related to Buddhism. 'Gurukul' means receiving education, based on Hindu philosophy, at a guru's 'Ashram' (residence or in a place) where education is provided by a guru. These religious schools have been providing formal education on their own initiatives but have no affiliation with the government in this regard (CERID, 2007)

Table 2: Number of schools by levels and types

School by levels and types	Community Schools	Institutional schools	Number of religious community schools				Total
			Madarasa	Gumba/Vihar	Gurukul	Total	
Primary (1-5)	27,848	4,836	674	51	30	755	32,684
Lower Secondary (6-8)	8,861	3,078	17	4	17	38	11,939
Basic (1-8)	28,008	4,857	674	53	39	766	32,865
Secondary (9-10)	4,960	2,306	5	1	8	14	7,266
Higher secondary (11-12)	1,879	685	1	0	0	1	2,564
Secondary (9-12)	5,009	2,550	5	1	8	14	7,559

Source: MoE (2011a, 2011b)

The Table 3 below illustrate the total student enrolment rates by school types and levels. In terms of gender perspective, the share of enrolment for girls at primary (Grades 1-5) is 50.4%, lower secondary is 49.9% and 50.2% at basic level (Grades 9-12). Similarly, girls' enrolment at secondary level (Grades 9-10) is 48.8%, whereas it is 50.7% at the higher secondary and 49.3% at secondary level (Grades 9-12).

Table 3: The total number of student enrolled in schools

Levels and types of schools	Community schools			Institutional schools			Total Student enrolments	% of girls
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total		
Primary (1-5)	2,239,485 (89.8%)	2,123,958 (86.4%)	4,363,443 (88.1%)	254,987 (10.2%)	333,526 (13.6%)	588,513 (11.9%)	4,951,956	50.4
Lower Secondary (6-8)	747,613 (88.2%)	721,520 (84.7%)	1,469,133 (86.4%)	99,994 (11.8%)	130,800 (15.3%)	230,794 (13.6%)	1,699,927	49.9
Basic (1-8)	2,987,098 (89.4%)	2,845,478 (86.0%)	5,832,576 (87.7%)	354,981 (10.6%)	464,326 (14.0%)	819,307 (12.3%)	6,651,883	50.2
Secondary (9-10)	338,304 (85.4%)	341,550 (82.1%)	679,854 (83.7%)	57,641 (14.6%)	74,415 (17.9%)	132,056 (16.3%)	811,910	48.8

Higher secondary (11-12)	143,063 (88.6%)	134,049 (85.4%)	277,112 (87.0%)	18,423 (11.4%)	22,891 (14.6%)	41,314 (13.0%)	318,426	50.7
Secondary (9-12)	481,367 (86.4%)	475,599 (83.0%)	956,966 (84.7%)	76,064 (13.6%)	97,306 (17.0%)	173,370 (15.3%)	1,130,336	49.3

The enrolment rate in school education in Nepal has shown an increasing trend in the last decade. For example, from 2003 to 2010, net primary enrolment (Grades 1-5) rose from 83.5 per cent to 94.5 per cent, and net secondary enrolment (Grades 9-10) increased from 29.5 per cent to 46.5 per cent<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, as can be seen in the Table 3 above, the gender disparities in school enrolment is not significant.

### 2.3.3 Number of teachers at all types of schools and their training status

According to MoE (2011b), 167,216 (42.24% female) teachers are serving in Primary, 46,031 (25.86% female) are in lower secondary, 33,835 (17.34% female) are in secondary, and 15,425 (12.80% female) are in higher secondary level. The statistics reveals that, despite the increase in girls' enrolment in school education, a significant disparity in the teaching profession remains between men and women in Nepal. The Table 4 below shows the training status of serving teachers in schools.

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<sup>13</sup> MoE (2011a), Nepal Education in Figure 2011 At-a-Glance



Table 4: Number of teachers and their training status in 2010-11

Number of teachers by level and training status	Trained			Partially trained			Untrained			Total number of teachers		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Total female	Total male	Total
Primary (1-5)	56,411	78,580	134,991 (80.72%)	5,796	10,425	16,221	8,438	7,566	16,004	70,645 (42.24%)	96,571	167,216
Lower Secondary (1-8)	7,604	21,661	29,265 (63.57%)	1,786	4,229	6,015	2,518	8,234	10,752	11,908 (25.86%)	34,124	46,032
Secondary (9-10)	4,924	23,856	28,780 (85.05%)	549	1,729	2,278	394	2,383	2,777	5,867 (17.34%)	27,968	33,835
Higher secondary (11-12)	1,320	6,482	7,802 (50.58%)	82	1,769	1,851	573	5,199	5,772	1,975 (12.80%)	13,450	15,425

Source: MoE, Flash Report I 2010-11

Prior to the implementation of School Sector Reform Plan, the minimum academic qualification required to teach at primary level was SLC and at least ten months teacher training; at the lower secondary level, Intermediate in Education (I.Ed.), or higher secondary degree (10+2) with education stream, or non-educational intermediate level with at least ten months teacher training; and at the secondary level Bachelor's degree in Education (B.Ed.), or a non-education Bachelor's degree with ten months teacher training (e.g., one year B.Ed. after a subject degree). In addition to the professional qualification, the government has made it mandatory for all teacher candidates to pass a teaching license examination conducted by the Teacher Service Commission (TSC), and obtain this license prior to applying for a temporary or permanent teaching post. However, I discuss later, considering the need to address the new school education system, the Teacher Development Policy Guideline (TDPG) has raised the minimum teaching qualifications of teachers meaning that many serving teachers require to upgrade their teaching qualifications. As a consequence, 54% of total teachers working at the basic level (Grades 1-8), and 30% teachers teaching Grades 9-10 are still under-qualified as against the new qualification criteria (M.Ed. or equivalent) defined by the School Sector Reform Plan and TDPG (MoE, 2010). However, the report has estimated that the teachers



currently working in higher secondary schools (11-12) have already possessed the stipulated level of qualification.

#### **2.3.4 Higher education in Nepal: Status, issues and prospects**

Higher education in Nepal began with the foundation of Tri-Chandra College in 1918. A few years after the overthrow of the autocratic Rana regime, Tribhuvan University (TU), the first university of Nepal, was established in 1959, and this contributed to the rapid expansion of higher education in Nepal. During the period between the establishment of Tri-Chandra College, and the establishment of democracy in 1951, there were about 500 students admitted to higher education (UNESCO, 2008). Tri-Chandra College, and more than half a dozen colleges set up in later years, followed the syllabus of Patna University, India, and the university conducted the examinations of these institutions until the TU came into existence. According to Khaniya (2007), during the educational expansion phase (1918-1971), 53 community colleges and training centres were established across the country, and all these colleges were nationalised and brought under TU in 1971 after the government introduced a five-year (1971-1976) National Education System Plan (NESP).

During the 1980s, because of high enrolment pressure, TU started providing affiliation to private sector institutions. Following the recommendation of various educational commissions (e.g. the Royal Commission on Higher Education 1983, the High Level Education commission 1992, the National Education Commission 1993, the Higher Education Project 1992-2001), the Nepal government adopted a provision of multi-university and regional university so as to decentralise the education system, to provide greater access and to ensure a more equitable distribution of higher education at regional level. At present there are six universities with five currently in operation, and the government of Nepal has approved another three regional universities. However, Lumbini Buddha University and the three regional universities have not

yet started their academic programmes. Additionally, three autonomous medical academies (i.e. B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Science, the National Academy of Medical Science and Patan Academy of Health Sciences) are also offering higher education.

All universities are non-profit autonomous institutions, partially financed by the Government of Nepal and partly by the revenue raised from the students and affiliated colleges. However, Kathmandu University is the only privately managed non-government public institution, and therefore, receives very limited government funding. Universities are under the supervision of the University Grants Commission (UGC) which is responsible for formulating policies for the allocation of government grants to the universities and higher education institutions, and monitoring their programmes and activities in order to maintain their quality and standards.

Considering the rapid expansion of the school system, particularly by private entrepreneurs, the population growth and the increased demand for higher education in various courses, the government has granted permission to a number of private colleges to affiliate with the existing universities. Therefore, universities have constituent<sup>14</sup> and affiliated<sup>15</sup> campuses (are either private or community-based). The affiliated colleges are supervised and monitored by the universities, to which they are affiliated, including conducting examinations and providing accreditation.

There has been a dramatic proliferation of higher educational institutions over the last two decades in Nepal. According to UGC (2012b), the number of campuses in Nepal increased

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14 Constituent colleges receive public funding and universities supervise their academic, financial, and administrative aspects.

15 Institutions managed by community or private organisation and its programmes are accredited by university. While community colleges receive a small amount of funding through UGC, private colleges do not receive government funding.

from 571 to 982 in the years 2005-2009 with an average annual growth rate of 14.4 per cent, and with the average annual growth rate of affiliated campuses at 16.6 per cent. Despite the rapid expansion of education institutions, several problems and challenges in the higher education sector still remain unsolved. For example, the salient issues and challenges in higher education in Nepal are related to improving access and equity; quality and relevance; enhancing management and governance; lack of adequate resources and infrastructure; reviewing of curricula and the examination system; inadequate public financing on education, implementing a decentralisation policy in a practical way; and rescuing universities and educational institutions from extreme political influence (Khaniya, 2007; Simkhada and Teijlingen, 2010). The government expenditure on education was 12.82 per cent of the total national budget in 2000/01, and 17.11 per cent in the fiscal year 2010/11, which represents an increase of 24.50 per cent compared to the fiscal year 2009/10 (MoE, 2011a). In the fiscal year 2009/10, the public spending on higher education was 0.4 per cent of GDP, which was 1.7 per cent of the national budget and 10.7 per cent of the total education budget (UGC, 2012b). Based on the UGC report about 90 per cent of funding allocated to higher education goes to Tribhuvan University. Even though public expenditure on education shows an increasing trend, it is important to substantially increase public financing and expenditure on higher education in order to expand access and to improve quality.

The government of Nepal, with the assistance of the World Bank, has also initiated the Second Higher Education Project (SHEP, 2007 -2014) in order to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education and research. According to World Bank (2011b), the project is particularly concerned with:

- a. enhancing quality and relevance of higher education and research through a set of incentives for promoting effective management and improving financial sustainability of constituent campuses and help augment the infrastructure of community campuses;
- b. improving access for academically qualified under-privileged students, including girls, Dalits and educationally disadvantaged Janajati to higher education through financial assistance and through the enhanced capacity of higher secondary schools.

Although Nepal has entered a multi-university era, and the government has emphasised the decentralisation of higher education by establishing regional universities to make education accessible to the rural, poor and marginalised population, due to the constant political instability, it seems that the policies and plans of government still take years to put into practice. Apart from improving access to, and equity in, education, there is also an urgent need to improve the educational quality in Nepal. Improving education quality inevitably involves the contribution of qualified teachers, and teacher training programmes have the potential to contribute to teacher quality concerns. A research report on primary teacher training in Nepal has found that teacher training programmes contribute significantly towards improving quality, access, equity, efficiency, teacher development, and overall school development (NCED, 2010). In the next section, I explore teacher education and training practices in Nepal.

## **2.4 Overview of teacher education policies and practices in Nepal**

Teacher training in Nepal started with the establishment of the College of Education in 1956 with a degree programme in education, and primary teachers were also provided with training through a network of mobile centres in various districts. However, with the implementation of the Nepal Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971, the Institute of Education (IoE) of Tribhuvan University (TU) was given the responsibility of providing educational degree

courses, and conducting all types (e.g. *pre-service*<sup>16</sup> and *in-service*<sup>17</sup>) of primary teacher training programmes. After NESP made primary teacher training mandatory for teachers in order to get a permanent tenure in the profession, the government also introduced a DL teacher training programme in the late 1970s to upgrade the qualifications of untrained and under-qualified primary teachers, which will be discussed below. The NESP also emphasised vocational education in lower-secondary and secondary level, and, therefore, IoE conducted both in-service and pre-service teacher training programmes on different campuses under Institute of Education (Awasthi, 2003). The Royal commission on Higher Education (1980) converted IoE to the Faculty of Education (FoE) under TU, and made FoE responsible for providing degree level pre-service teacher training programmes while MoE was designated for conducting all in-service training to the teachers with different qualification backgrounds.

#### **2.4.1 Teacher education in Nepal since 1990**

After the restoration of democracy in the 1990s, the government of Nepal recognised education as a major development sector and therefore, institutionalised teacher education, and consequently teacher education became one of the more highly financed programmes (DoE, 2006). In 1992, the government restored the mandatory provision for teacher training that was terminated after the review of NESP in 1980. To address the need of training large numbers of untrained teachers, the government launched the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP, 1992-2003), Primary Education Development Project (PEDP, 1992-1998), and Secondary

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16 An institution based teacher preparation course delivered to trainee teachers prior to entering the teaching profession

17 Teacher training delivered for unqualified or under-qualified teachers, who are already in teaching profession, to enable them to acquire recognised teaching qualification, or to upgrade their educational qualifications, or to facilitate their continuous professional development.

Education Development Project (SEDP 1992-1998) for implementing various long-term and short-term teacher training programmes. The objectives of the SEDP were to improve the quality and efficiency of lower secondary (Grades 6–8) and secondary (Grades 9–10) education nationwide and overall, the Project’s institutional development and other impacts were considered satisfactory (NCED, 2009b). Following the recommendation of the National Educational Commission (1992), the Secondary Education Development Centre and the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) were established for providing a range of primary and secondary in-service teacher training programmes. A Teacher Management and Coordination Committee (TMCC) was also formed to facilitate the MoE in formulating training policies and strategic guidelines.

During 2001-2003, the Distance Education Centre launched an Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) pilot project, with the support of UNICEF, for supporting teachers of mathematics and English, who were teaching third-grade and fifth-grade students, respectively. However, the programme could not continue beyond the pilot period, and the Nepal government prioritised Education for All and produced National Plan of Action (EFA-NPA, 2001-15) and the EFA core policy document (2004-2009). The EFA targeted to train 99% primary teachers. To support the EFA policy target, the Teacher Education Project (TEP, 2002-2009), funded jointly by the Government of Nepal, and Asian Development Bank, was initiated with the objective of assisting the government in improving the access, quality and efficiency of basic primary education through the development of better-qualified teachers, and by strengthening the capacity of teacher training institutions. According to NCED (2009b), the TEP entailed four major components:

- a. Building an effective and sustainable system of teacher education by strengthening institutional capacity;

- b. Developing effective teacher education curricula and teaching-learning materials;
- c. Training teachers, educational administrators, and managers;
- d. Educating teachers to better serve the needs of girls and other disadvantaged groups.

In line with the TEP goal of creating Extensive Training Networks (ETNs) in order to create and maximise training opportunities at local level, NCED established a network of twenty-nine Education Training Centres (ETCs), five sub-centres across the country. In order to facilitate timely accomplishment of pre-service and in-service teacher training through public-private partnership, NCED also collaborated with Alternative Providers (APs) such as Faculty of Education campuses, Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) schools and with numerous private primary teacher training centres (PPTTCs). According to NCED (2009a), the project made remarkable progress in terms of producing master trainers (286%) and trainers (203%), and in the training of education officials and head teachers (at 94% and 115% respectively). TEP came to an end in 2009 as it made an impressive achievement in training a total of 103,996 primary school teachers in various modules of 10-month teacher training, representing a 90% achievement of TEP targets (NCED, 2009a, 2009b). However, TEP was launched targeting teachers in public schools and no evidence was reported on the impact of teacher training on students' learning outcomes (NCED, 2011).

In 2005, the government of Nepal established the Council for Educational Human Resource Development (CEHRD), headed by the Minister of Education, to provide policy guidelines to NCED. The NCED has developed and commenced implementation of an “Online/offline Teachers Professional Development” program with an objective of addressing pedagogical problems of the teachers and at providing them with continuous learning opportunities for renewal of professional knowledge (NECD, 2011). The three-month professional development programme was based on face-to-face contact session workshops (12 days) and Self-Study (78

days). Several departments within the MoE such as DoE/District Education Offices, Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and Non-formal Education Centre (NFEC) are also involved in providing teacher trainings. Additionally, the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) also conducts trainings, workshops, and conferences on English Language Teaching.

#### **2.4.2 Teacher development policy and guidelines since 2010**

At present, Nepal is heading towards a transformation of the school education system with the implementation of the Education for All National Plan of Action (2001-2015), National Curriculum Framework (2005), and School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) (2009-2015) and has emphasised the need for integrating Grades 1 to 12 into the school system. Considering the need to address the new school education structure, in accordance with the SSSP, the MoE have approved a Teacher Development Policy Guideline (TDPG) devised by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED, 2011). One of the important implications of the school integrated school system is the need for redesigning teacher professional development policies, plan and programme. Therefore, TDPG has changed the required minimum qualification of teachers to cater to needs of new school system. According to NCED (2011), the guideline outlines the minimum qualifications and training provision as:

- a. For basic level: Intermediate in Education (I. Ed.), or Higher School Leaving Certificate (HSLC)-in-Education /PCL in Education (I. Ed.) , or HSLC with one-year special Teacher Preparation Course (TPC)
- b. For secondary level: M.Ed., or Master Degree qualifications with one-year special Teacher Preparation Course (TPC)
- c. Teachers' professional development will be linked to career development and made available through both long and short term means.



- d. Head-teachers will be selected from among serving teachers. Minimum qualifications and training: B.Ed. or equivalent qualification for basic level and M.Ed. or equivalent qualification for secondary level, and certification training on School Management and Leadership is mandatory.

Additionally, the policy guidelines state that teachers with HSLC- in-Education, I.Ed or PCL with relevant teacher preparation course will be eligible to teach 1-5 Grades of the basic level, and teachers with B.Ed. or Bachelor level qualifications with teacher preparation courses will also be eligible to teach at the secondary level (Grades 9-10). The guideline also maintains that for those in-service teachers, who opt to obtain a higher degree, study leave will be provided in order to upgrade their qualifications to meet the new requirements within a specific period. However, such study leave provision would seem to be difficult in terms of practicality because of the large number of teachers requiring such leave. The government of Nepal has also made training mandatory to all teachers teaching in religious schools. Despite the huge success of the Teacher Education Project in providing training to school teachers, due to the new educational structures, Nepal faces an urgent need again to upgrade the qualification of serving teachers.

The National Centre of Educational Development, in collaboration with NCED and Tribhuvan University/Faculty of Education (FoE), is planning to develop and implement "professional M.Ed." (P.M.Ed) program for the purpose of upgrading qualification of serving secondary teachers having B.Ed. or equivalent qualifications.

Furthermore, the TDPG policy has stressed that teacher development institutions should make sure that their academic and professional degree programmes should prepare candidates able to teach *three* school subjects for basic level (Grades 1-8) school education, and *two* subjects for secondary level (Grades 8-12) education. The government plan has posed key challenges

to educational institutions offering B.Ed., and M.Ed. degrees as currently teacher education degrees only prepare teachers to teach one specific school subject, and curriculum reform also involves high cost.

Additionally, due to the fact that only a limited number of higher secondary institutions offer a teacher education course, the decision of the government to phase out PCL level, including Intermediate in Education (I. Ed.), is likely to have a greater impact on the number of prospective teachers pursuing a Bachelor's degree. At the period of transition, higher secondary education with education stream is mostly provided by private institutions, and therefore, not all trainee teachers will be able to afford such courses due to the high costs. In this context, there is a need for a more flexible approach to teacher education and training in Nepal. Such provision will provide better training possibilities to both pre-service and in-service teachers for obtaining or upgrading their teaching qualifications by utilising their leisure time, and while still engaging in their routine jobs in schools. In this regard, Open and Distance Education (ODE) provision can be considered as a viable alternative method for training teachers in Nepal.

## **2.5 The prospects of open and distance education in Nepal**

Reaching geographically diverse, poor and rural populations; out-of-school children; educationally deprived groups; and teachers immediately requiring teaching qualifications or qualification upgrading may require a more flexible educational system. The continued political unrest and the culture of Banda and strikes have resulted in the frequent closure of educational institutions in Nepal. Consequently, students are not able to attend regular campus-based classes. The study conducted by UNESCO (2008) also suggests that Open Mode/Open School/Open University, and e-learning systems, eventually helps irregular students and the students of remote areas as well as working people willing to pursue higher education in Nepal.

Therefore, ODE provision has potential to increase access to education and training opportunities in a geographically diverse, post-conflict and politically unstable, and economically poor country like Nepal. In this context, the Nepal government has shown interest in reviewing the current education provision and making efforts to exploit the potential of the ODE system so that it caters for the emerging needs of those who want to continue their education.

### **2.5.1 Open and distance education policy in Nepal**

The government of Nepal, through the Open and Distance Education (ODE) Policy Framework (MoE, 2006) and the 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year National Development Plan (2002-2007), has stressed the need to establish an Open University to expand full access to higher education. The recent Three-Year Interim Plan (2007-2010) has also given continued emphasis on establishing an Open University in the country. The policy framework aims to achieve the following five objectives:

- a. to expand full access to school and higher education to learners having diverse and special needs especially of out-of-school children, deprived groups, working people, housewives and so on through the open and distance learning system as supplementary to the existing system of education;
- b. to improve the quality of conventional education through different kinds of support mechanisms and materials by the application of information and communication technology (ICT);
- c. to promote lifelong learning, continuing education and professional development through the open and distance learning system by applying a mixed mode delivery mechanism;

- d. to establish a provision to provide skill-based education through customised courses to cater for the needs of a labour force seeking employment in the national and international job market;
- e. to create an avenue for skill certification and accreditation to preserve the traditional skills and customary learning of the tribal and indigenous communities.

Several commitments, plans and programmes have been proposed in recent years that deal with improving access to and quality of education in Nepal including higher education. However, though the government often reiterates educational commitments in its planning and policy documents, it has yet to take any practical initiatives regarding the implementation of the proposed educational policies, action plans and programmes. For example, the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1977-2002) identified the need to establish an Open University in the country, but the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) concluded that due to issues related to infrastructure development, the aim of establishing the Open University could not be achieved. The current Three Year Interim Plan (2007-2010) has continued the objective of previous plans to establish an Open University and has again expressed a commitment to bring it into operation, but the government has yet to bring this about.

Nevertheless, the government has also started an “open school system” to ensure educational access to learners having diverse and special needs, especially out-of-school children, deprived groups, and children affected by armed conflict. Some privately funded colleges are also offering DL courses designed by different international institutions, particularly courses related to business administration, public administration, banking and finance, information technology, journalism and mass communication, tourism, and sociology. For example, the International Centre for Academics, College of Professional Studies, British Council Nepal, and Association of Chartered Certified Accountants are among a few institutions that have been

offering DL courses designed by the international providers in various disciplines. These DE providers charge NRS. 50,000 to over 200,000 (approx. 500 to over 2000 GBP) for bachelor's and master's degree courses. However, costs vary depending on the type of institution and number of years required to complete the course. The growing demand by students for enrolment on such courses suggests that Nepal should immediately act to establish an Open University, and provide more market-oriented and job-oriented DL courses.

The discussion above provides the educational context in which the DE is located and the opportunities for its growth, and its relevance to the societal needs in Nepal. What follows is the general overview of teacher education through distance mode, particularly with reference to teacher development and training in Nepal.

### **2.5.2 The use of distance mode for teacher education**

Distance education has been widely used as a significant and legitimate way of training teachers in both developing and developed countries (Shelton-Mayes and Burgess, 2010; Robinson and Latchem, 2003). Distance mode has been employed “extensively to provide pre-service teacher preparation, upgrading of academic qualifications, and in-service continuing professional development in particular subjects, content areas and instructional methods” (UNESCO, 2002a, p. 29). Through the international experiences and case studies, scholars have demonstrated that DE system for teacher education have been used mainly for: *initial teacher education*<sup>18</sup>, *continued professional development*, *re-orientation of teachers for curriculum reform and change*, and *in supporting teachers' career development* (Moon et al.,

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18 It refers to teacher education, preparation and training programme that leads to fully qualified, licensed or accredited teacher status according to the official standards of a country. This approach can be pre-service or in-service (Shelton-Mayes and Burgess, 2010; UNESCO, 2001).

2005; Perraton et al., 2007; Perraton, 2010; UNESCO, 2002b). However, these categories are not mutually exclusive as there are considerable overlaps between them. International case studies show that DE around the world has been used to reach trainees in geographically challenging areas (e.g., mountainous areas in Nepal); for training teacher on massive scale (e.g., in China); for responding to the shortage of primary-school teachers (e.g., Kenya, Uganda); to support curriculum reform and teacher qualification upgrading (e.g., Chile); for widening access to teacher education for marginalised communities, women and minority groups (e.g., Sudan and Pakistan) and equity (Perraton, 2000; Perraton et al.; 2007, UNESCO, 2002a). Shelton-Mayes and Burgess (2010) report that DE in Eritrea was used for creating training opportunities for females who were unable to move away from home and families due to cultural, religious or economic difficulties. Therefore, DL programmes for teacher education and training can serve these purposes: to provide cost-effective education and training; to provide training on a large scale within a short period and to respond to the shortage of qualified teachers; to serve marginalised groups, remote and rural population and widen their access to learning opportunities and resources; and to train teachers for curriculum change, use of new technologies and new teaching approaches (Robinson and Latchem, 2003). However, shortage of qualified teachers, issues of access and diversity have been the key factors for using distance mode in initial teacher education in both developing and developed countries (Shalton-Mayes and Burgess, 2010). Additionally, UNESCO (2002b) reports that in terms of costs, for example, initial teacher education through distance mode in Nigeria was found to be cheaper than with a conventional programme.

### **2.5.3 Teacher education through distance mode in Nepal**

Although still not institutionalised, DE in Nepal started with adult education courses in 1957 when the Adult Education Section of the College of Education, TU, broadcast Radio

Programmes for Youth. This programme was transmitted twice a week, from 1962. The milestone in using distance mode started when such provision was applied to teacher training. After the National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971-76) made teacher training mandatory in order to obtain a permanent tenure in teaching, the realisation came of the inability of the College of Education to train teachers on a mass scale and the inadequacy of the conventional approach to teacher training. In order to cater for the needs of immediately providing training to all in-service teachers in the country, the government of Nepal made efforts to bring about radical changes in the way teachers were trained. As a result, the Institute of Education (IoE) was set up under TU making it responsible for providing teacher training programmes, and IoE initiated teacher training through distance mode in 1976/77. This programme was basically aimed at upgrading the academic qualifications of under-SLC teachers by using cost-effective means, and train in-service primary school teachers in the remote areas. In order to implement the strategy, IoE developed a set of DL materials based on the given curriculum, prepared a teaching team, contact session strategies, and graduation requirements. Teachers were required to attend two months of contact sessions, normally conducted during the long vacations at regional level to avoid interference with their teaching jobs. The examination conducted at the end of the contact sessions determined whether or not the trainees would acquire the Certificate of Academic Achievement. However, the programme was discontinued when the government of Nepal initiated an innovative teacher training programme called the Radio Education Teacher Training Project (RETTP) in 1978.

The RETTP started transmitting radio lessons in 1980, and the broadcast was geared to providing training for untrained and under qualified in-service primary school teachers to improve classroom teaching. The radio lessons were accompanied by SLMs to be studied under the supervision of district teacher educators for three months followed by two months intensive training. During the first phase teaching methodology was emphasised but, following the

findings of the mid-term evaluation of RETTP, RETTP II started in 1984 which focused on providing content knowledge to teachers. In 1986, the government started the Radio Tuition Programme (RTP), covering high-school curricula in mathematics, English, Nepali and science, aimed at raising the under-SLC teachers' knowledge of these subjects and to help these teachers prepare for the SLC examinations. However, following the government's decision not to provide training to under-SLC teachers, the RTP was discontinued. During the period of 1980s to 1987, RETT enrolled 6429 under-SLC teachers, out of which 5317 (84%) completed the training but only 3478 (54%) passed the exam (Holmes et al., 1993).

Beginning in 1987, the RETTP project started providing a Basic Teacher Training (BTT) course (both radio-based and face-to-face mode) for SLC-pass teachers accompanied by printed material. The radio-based course contained 150-hours (120 hours of radio lessons and 30 hours of practical sessions) of training. BTT aired half hour lessons six days a week. Trainees were required to pass a final examination conducted at the end of the course. During 1989 to 1990, the BTT enrolled 3374 teachers and produced 1908 graduates (Holmes et al, 1991). Though discontinued due to the lack of funding, RETTP project contributed significantly in upgrading Nepalese teachers' qualifications. The cost of the RETTP programme was found slightly lower than alternatives, and evidence suggested that the programme was no less-effective than the face-to-face alternatives (Perraton and Creed, 2000).

The Distance Education Centre (DEC) was established in 1993, to replace the RETTP, to provide regular in-service training to teachers. Following the government's decision in 1992, to regulate a mandatory ten months training for teachers, the DEC designed training curricula, SLMs and 40 hours of radio broadcasts. The radio-based teacher training aired a half hour programme six days a week supported by SLMs, a radio summary handbook, and contact sessions. In the wake of the reports of the National Education Commission 1992, the National



Centre for Educational Development (NCED), under the MoE, was established in 1993 and since then NCED has initiated various types of in-service training for teachers. In 2004, the NCED underwent a major restructuring in order to strengthen the institutional capacity and co-ordinate all teacher training activities. As a result all teacher training institutions including Secondary Education Development Centre (SEDC) and the Distance Education Centre (DEC) were brought under NCED, and consequently, NCED has emerged as an apex institution for developing training curricula, planning training programmes and monitoring of training activities, institution capacity building, research and policy domains with greater authority (NCED, 2007). Additionally, NCED also functions as the Secretariat for the Council for Educational Human Resource Development (CEHRD), headed by the Minister for Education. As an integral part of Teacher Education Project (TEP) and Secondary Education Support Programme (SESP), to clear the backlog of untrained serving teachers, the NCED launched a ten month in-service teacher training course through its ETN centres, and a ten-month pre-service course targeting those prospective teachers who have the minimum SLC qualification through PTTCs affiliated to the NCED. The Table 5 below provides the overview of the in-service course components.

**Table 5: The in-service training course components**

Level	First Phase/module (2.5 Month)	Second phase/module (5 months)	Third phase/module (2.5 months)
Primary	Institution-based	Distance mode (radio) supported by Self-Learning Materials and contact sessions	Institution-based
Lower Secondary and Secondary	1 month institution-based	Distance mode (radio) supported by Self-Learning Materials and contact sessions	1 month institution-based
	1.5 month school-based		1.5 month school-based

Source: NCED (2007)

Although the NCED had successfully provided ten month in-service training to 98.2% of school teachers (both primary and secondary teachers) by 2009, greater relevance of training materials and further improvements of internal efficiency and classroom effectiveness continue to pose challenges to the training system (NCED, 2009b).

The Tenth Five-Year plan (2002-2007), stated in its policy that teacher training of all levels would be conducted through the open and distance mode and necessary steps would be taken to establish an Open University in Nepal. The current Three Year Interim Plan (2007-2010) has also prioritised the establishment of a DE system in order to increase access by all Nepalese to educational opportunity, and the SSRP (2009-2015) has also emphasised the need for a flexible approach to education for teacher training. However, as described in Chapter One, currently CDET is the only institution offering teacher education courses through distance mode in Nepal

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided historical, political and educational context as well as the use of DE for teacher training in Nepal. It seems that DL approaches are likely to benefit a larger population, and untrained teachers, who are facing difficulties in accessing campus-based programmes due to geographic barriers, social, political and personal circumstances. DE system may also be a cost-effective alternative to teacher development and training in Nepal. For example, Moon and Robinson (2003) suggest that distance approaches can be used for initial teacher training (both in-service and pre-service) to produce qualified teachers at lower cost. In the next chapter, I explore the concepts of open learning, and distance education; theories of distance education; models of DE programme evaluation; and devise an analytical framework to explore the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors on a B.Ed. course conducted through distance mode in Nepal.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first explore the notions of open education (OE) and distance education (DE). Secondly, I provide an overview of the theoretical perspectives on DE, including a consideration of Community of Practice (CoP), as the examination and understanding of theoretical ideas may help shed light on DE practices in Nepal. Thirdly, in order to investigate the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal, I review some of the existing models of educational evaluation as well as guidelines on distance education programme evaluation. Finally, building on existing literature, I devise an analytical framework to explore the effectiveness of the B.Ed. programme in Nepal. The chapter concludes with critical perspectives on theories discussed and their relevance to this study.

### 3.2 Open education, distance education, and open and distance education

Keegan (1996, p. 23) points out that there is a considerable “overlap” between the use of the term ‘*open education*’ and ‘*distance education*’, and often the terms *open learning* and *distance education* are used loosely or interchangeably (Kember, 2007). However, “open learning is not necessarily at a distance, or distance learning open” (Simpson, 2002, p. 2). In the sections below, I explore these notions in detail.

#### 3.2.1 Open education and open learning

The concept of *open education*, often referred to in the literature as *open learning*, has been conceptualised and interpreted in a variety of ways (Marland, 1997). As a result, some scholars consider *open learning* as ‘an umbrella’ term (Thorpe and Grugeon, 1987) that embraces distance learning, correspondence courses, self-study, student-centred learning and flexible

learning (Kember and Murphy, 1990), and distance learning as a “sub-category of open learning” (Lewis and Spencer, 1986, p. 17). However, claiming that the term open learning eludes precise definition, other scholars argue that open learning is an “elusive term” (Paul, 1993, p. 114) and “imprecise phrase” (Mackenzie et al, 1975, p. 15). In this regard, Rumble (1997, p. 4) maintains that:

*Open learning is an imprecise phrase describing any form of educational provision in which the restrictions placed on students are minimised, and in which decisions about learning is taken by learners themselves. The decisions may cover many aspects of the learning process, including whether or not to begin and continue to study, what to learn (selection of content/skills, selection of courses), how to learn (including choice of methods, routes through courses and media), where to study (not necessarily in classroom), when to study (including when to start, how rapidly to progress and when to finish), how to be assessed, whom to approach for help, and what to do next.*

Rowntree (1997, p. 44) argues that openness has philosophical interpretations, i.e., open learning in principle is concerned with making learning more accessible and learner-centred by empowering learners:

*Open learning is a philosophy – one of giving learners more access to learning and mode choice and control over what and how they learn. Sometimes this means merely that learners are able to choose the ‘time, place, and pace’ of their learning.*

However, Perraton (2000, p. 10) contended that:

*The concept ‘open learning’, with its ambiguities about meaning of the term ‘open’, has led some of its protagonists to shy away from defining it, labelling it a philosophy rather than a method, as if that were an excuse for its vagueness.*

For Perraton open learning refers to “an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimised either in terms of access, or of time and place, pace, methods of study or any combination of these” (2000, p. 10.). Race expressed similar views that open learning allows flexibility and choice to students regarding “where, when, at what pace, and how they actually undertake their studies” (2007, p. 158).

Some scholars point out that an essential feature of *open education* is the removal of barriers to educational opportunities. For example, Escotet (1980, p. 144) maintained that:

*Open education is particularly characterised by the removal of restriction, exclusions and privileges; by the accreditation of students' previous experiences; and by the flexibility of the management of time variable; and by substantial changes in the traditional relationship between professors and students.*

Based on the definitions stated above, it is clear that there are diverse views on open learning and openness has many dimensions. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that open learning refers to a provision directed primarily towards increasing access to educational opportunities by removing barriers and restrictions, such as course entry requirements and attendance restrictions, and enabling learners to study at the time, place and pace convenient to their circumstances and requirements. In other words, open learning provision intends to provide learning experiences that cater for students' diversity in learning styles, goals, needs and approaches (Marland, 1997). However, Forsyth (1999, p. 13) argues that, in reality, it is impossible to find “a true open learning course, where learners can learn about any topic at any time. There will always be some types of restrictions”.

### **3.2.2 Distance education and distance learning**

The terms *distance education* and *distance learning* are often used synonymously in the literature. Some scholars argue, however, that these two notions are not the same, because

distance education refers to a planned organisational framework and systematic process of providing education at a distance (Moore and Kearsley 1996; Willis, 1993), while distance learning is used to refer to the result of distance education endeavours. More and Kersey (2012) suggest that because the focus of education involves teaching as well as learning, the term education should be used. Kanuka and Conrad (2003) also argue that distance education is an inclusive term that embraces not only teaching and learning at a distance but also the organisational and administrative arrangements necessary to facilitate distance learning activities. According to Willis (1993, p. 3), distance learning refers to “the intended instructional outcomes, i.e., learning that takes place at a distance”.

The history of distance education can be traced back to the age of correspondence education (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2010). Since its introduction, distance education has been conceptualised in various ways and defined from a number of perspectives. Some definitions begin with organisational or structural concerns, whereas others focus on pedagogical concerns (White, 2003). For example, while some scholars are concerned with how the field of distance education is organised and how it functions (e.g., Keegan, 1996; Peters, 1997), others emphasise the centrality of learners and interactions (e.g., Holmberg, 1983; Moore, 1993). Keegan (1996, p. 50) identified five key characteristics of distance education:

1. the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner;
2. the influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student- support services;
3. the use of technical media (print, audio, video) to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course;
4. the provision of two-way communication so that students may benefit from or even initiate dialogue;

5. the possibility of occasional meetings both for didactic and socialisation purposes.

Peters (1973, in Keegan, 1996, p. 41), considering distance education as an industrialised form of teaching and learning, defined distance education as:

*a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalised by the application of division of labour and organisational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material, which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time where they live.*

Similarly, Simonson and colleagues (2003, p. 28) consider distance education as “institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors”.

For Moore and Kearsley (2012, p. 2) distance education is “teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organisation”. This definition highlights that learning in distance education is ‘planned’, meaning ‘the path to learning is designed by one or more experts in the process’ (ibid.). The definition also puts emphasis on the role of mediated interactions and appropriate organisational arrangements in distance education but assumes that it is reasonable for students and tutors to meet face-to-face occasionally.

Perraton (1993, p. 63) defines distance education as “an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space or time from the learner”. Similarly for, Willis (1993, p. 3) distance education refers to “the organisational framework and processes of providing education at a distance”.

A closer look at the definitions of DE reveals that: distance education is an institutionally based formal educational process; learners and tutors are somewhat separated (in place and/or in time); specially designed study materials and instructional procedures are used; and new and emerging technologies are utilised to facilitate teaching and learning as well as to connect learners, tutors, and institutions offering distance courses. It is important to consider, however, that due to the proliferation of new educational technology, it becomes imperative for distance education providers to undergo a radical change and to develop new ways of using such technologies in distance education. For example, the existence of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and growth of Social Networking sites challenges the traditional ways in which distance education is defined (Simonson et al., 2003). Nevertheless, as far as distance education in the Nepalese context is concerned, such practice approximates to the definition conceptualised by Keegan (1996). Distance education in Nepal is characterised by geographical separation of students and tutors, the use of printed self-study materials, occasional face-to-face sessions and some rare use of emails and a little use of mobile phones.

### **3.2.3 The relationship between open and distance education**

It is apparent from the above discussion that, at least in principle, open education and distance education are separate concepts. In other words, open education is “primarily a goal, or educational policy”, whereas distance education is “less a philosophy and more a method of education” (Bates, 2005, p. 5). Although both concepts are often associated with improving access to education, OE is invariably more flexible than DE in terms of providing learners choice and control over their learning process. According to Bates (2005), open learning provision may include distance education, or it may depend on other flexible forms of learning. However, distance education programmes may not be open. That was certainly the case at CDET as students were required to meet admission requirements (i.e., Bachelor’s degree in a



relevant subject) to be eligible for the B.Ed. course, and attendance at face-to-face contact session tutorials was mandatory.

The concepts open and distance education (ODE), or open and distance learning (ODL) reflect a merger of two different educational provisions, i.e. open learning and distance education. UNESCO (2002, p. 7) maintains that the terms open learning and distance education “represent approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners”. Nevertheless, because of the nature and characteristics of the CDET B.Ed. programme, such as restrictions in terms of admission, attendance, examinations, course duration, I prefer using the term DE rather than ODE. Therefore, in this thesis, I use the term distance education (DE) to refer to teaching and learning as well as the organisational and administrative arrangements made available to facilitate the process. Whereas distance learning (DL) is employed to refer to learning that takes place at a distance as a result of DE initiatives.

The section below discusses major theories of DE, as it is believed that they contribute significantly to readers’ understanding of the practices of DE for teacher development and training in Nepal.

### **3.3 Theoretical perspectives on distance education**

Numerous attempts have been made to explain and theorise DE over the past three decades, and an understanding of DE theories is essential while exploring DE practices, and in illuminating problems, issues and challenges underlying the context of DE. Keegan (1996, p. 56) identifies the contribution of three approaches to the theoretical foundation of DE, theories of: *autonomy and interdependence* (Wedemeyer, 1977; Moore, 1973); *industrialisation* (Peters, 1983; Keegan, 1980); and *interaction and communication* (Bååth, 1982; Holmberg, 1983). As a result, different theoretical perspectives emerged such as the theory of the

empathetic teaching-learning conversation (Holmberg, 1995, 2003, 2005); the theory of industrialisation of teaching and learning (Peters, 1993, 2001, 2007); the theory of transactional distance (Moore, 1993, 2007); theory of community of practice<sup>19</sup> (Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger, 1998; Barab and Duffy, 2000); and the theory of community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison, 2009; Garrison and Archer, 2007).

I discuss these theories below, with the exception of community of inquiry as this proved to focus on education through online and virtual environments, which are not part of the context within online teacher education in Nepal.

### **3.3.1 The theory of the empathetic learning and teaching conversation**

Based on the notion of *guided didactic conversation* (Holmberg, 1983), which considered the learner-teacher dialogue as the fundamental element of DE, Holmberg developed this theory of DE. Holmberg's approach (Holmberg, 2005, 2007) is based on the following postulates:

1. Feelings of personal relations between the teaching and learning parties promote study pleasure and motivation;
2. Such feelings can be fostered by well-developed self-instructional material and two-way communication;
3. Intellectual pleasure and study motivation are favourable to the attainment of study goals and the use of proper study processes and methods;
4. The atmosphere, language and conventions of friendly conversation favour feelings of personal relations according to postulate 1;

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<sup>19</sup> Although the theory of community practice was developed to explore workplace learning, it may also be considered as a useful heuristic tool to describe how students share knowledge, experiences and resources, and learn from each other while learning at a distance.

5. Messages given and received in conversational forms are comparatively easily understood and remembered ;
6. The conversational concepts can be successfully applied to distance education and the media available to it.

(Holmberg, 2007, p. 70) .

In his theory, it was assumed that “personal relations”, “study pleasure”, and “feelings of empathy”, between students, tutors and supporting organisation is at the heart of effective DE (Holmberg, 2007, p. 69). In other words, Holmberg argues that friendly conversation and a feeling of personal connection are essential to promote intellectual pleasure and motivate students to learn, which is possible through the well-developed self-instructional materials. Therefore, the course designers should be responsible and “create a simulated conversation with the learner through well-written materials” (Garrison, 2000, p. 8). Holmberg maintains that instructional materials should be written using personal, conversational-like language, and this style of materials writing not only attempts to involve the students emotionally but also provides opportunities for students to check their understanding, and question and exchange their views with tutors (Holmberg, 2007). Additionally, he argues that:

*Distance education is guided and supported by non-contiguous means, primarily pre-produced course materials and mediated communication between students and a supporting organisation (university, school etc.) responsible for course development, instructional student-tutor interaction, counselling and administration of the teaching/learning process inclusive of arrangements for student-student interaction.*

(Holmberg, 2007, p. 81)

Holmberg (2007, p. 71) maintains that “extensive, friendly, helpful, and cooperative tutor comments on submitted assignments, contribute to emotional involvement and to study success”. Furthermore, Holmberg’s theory draws attention to the importance of pro-active learner support in DE programmes.

For a time, Holmberg referred to his empathy approach as *a theory of didactic conversation*, but in recent writing he notes that it was unfortunate terminology, indicating an “authoritarian approach (the opposite of what was meant)” (Holmberg, 2007, p. 79). Therefore, he renamed his approach to education as *the theory of teaching-learning conversation*. Holmberg provided the following assumptions regarding the empathy approach:

1. The stronger the characteristic of a teaching-learning conversation, the stronger the student’s feelings of personal relationship between them and the supporting organisation.
2. The stronger the student’s feelings that the supporting organisation is eager to make the learning matter personally relevant to them, then the greater the personal involvement.
3. The stronger the student’s feelings of personal relations with the supporting organisation and of being personally involved with the learning matter, the stronger the motivation and the more effective the learning.
4. The more independent and experienced the students, the less relevant the characteristics of teaching-learning conversations

(Holmberg, 2007, p. 71)

While Holmberg’s ideas offer valuable guidelines to DE institutions in order to provide an individual and effective DL experience for every learner. Although conversation was placed in the heart of his theory, real conversation with the tutor is, by economic necessity, supplementary to the pre-produced course (Garrison, 2000). However, Holmberg’s ideas that

DL materials should be written using a friendly language and conversational style of writing have been followed by many established institutions providing education at a distance.

### **3.3.2 The theory of industrialisation and teaching and learning**

According to Peters, the leading proponent of the theory, the impetus for the interpretation of DE as *the most industrialised form of teaching and learning* began in the late 1960s (Peters, 1997). During the industrialised era, DE provision evolved because of the intersection of three forces namely, social change, technological development, and the need of educational institutions to adapt to changing social needs (Miller, 2010). For these reasons, Peters argued that DE is “a typical product of industrial society” (Peters, 1993, p. 51). Peters also pointed out that in order to make DL effective planners of DE need “to concentrate on the task of dealing with students indirectly” – that is, by developing learning environments which are conducive to DL in which the students are “encouraged to become active in organising and managing their learning processes themselves” (ibid.).

Based on his observation of DE institutions of the 1960s, Peters employed the concepts and principles of industrial production processes as heuristic tools to interpret DE. Peters maintains that strategies and techniques, employed by DE institutions in the industrialisation era, such as *production planning* (e.g., development of courses by experts before the start of teaching); *division of labour* (e.g., allocation of tasks among stakeholders involved, such as planning, designing and delivering subject-matter, marking assignments, student support; *mechanisation* (e.g., use of printing-press, transport system and communication system for the production, distribution and delivery of the materials); and *mass production* (e.g., the production of DL course materials in a large volume), all correspond to the industrialised production process. Peters' perspective also implies that by applying standardisation procedures in the design, production and delivery of DL courses, reliable and effective learning outcomes can be ensured

(Moore and Kearsley, 1996). According to Peters, because of the above mentioned structural characteristics, DE “is to be regarded as a structurally, and fundamentally, different system of teaching and learning” than traditional face-to-face teaching and learning (Peters, 2001, p. 111). Peters notes that the relevance of the most industrialised form of teaching and learning has been proved by the success of the Open University in the UK. Keegan (1994, pp. 124-125) points out that the industrial production process and DE system exhibits similar characteristics, such as:

- The development of a distance study course is as important as the preparatory work taking place prior to a production process in industry.
- The effectiveness of the teaching process particularly depends on planning, infrastructure and institutional capacity.
- Distance education courses are formalised, standardised and the teaching process is largely objectified.
- Distance education often involves the mass production of course and other supporting materials.
- Distance teaching can only be economical with a strict focus on available resources and a centralised administration.

However, the notion of DE as the most industrialised form of instruction has been criticised by some scholars for having a ‘Fordist’ approach (Raggatt, 1993). The term Fordism is derived from Henry Ford's approach to the mass production and mass consumption of cars early in the 20th century (Simonson et al., 2003). The Fordist approach to education involves “a fully centralised”, national DE provider, “gaining greater economies of scale by offering courses to a mass market, thereby justifying a greater investment in more expensive course materials” (Simonson et al., 2003, pp. 49-50). While some scholars claim that education, based on the

Fordist approach, is unable to adapt to the needs of a post-industrial, fast-changing, customer-orientated society (Raggatt, 1993; Simonson et al, 2003), others claim that Peters exaggerated the industrialised form of education, as being radically different from conventional education (Keegan, 1996) because DE can consist of occasional face-to-face meetings with tutors, and conventional teaching also involves the division of labour among teachers, administrators and other supporting staff.

Peters' industrial theory stressed the organisational and administrative aspects rather than instructional processes or pedagogical facets of DE. Even though the theory of industrialised teaching is helpful in explaining the evolution of DE institutions as reflective of contemporary industrialised society, it "avoids the issue of the pedagogical assumptions underlying such a model" (Haughey et al., 2008, p. 5). However, Peters argues that his theory provides "a frame of reference to planners, teachers, learners, and evaluators", and helps "to analyse and interpret a complex system which consists of professional specialists, media, learners and teachers, support services, and quality management" (Peters, 2007, p. 62).

### **3.3.3 The theory of transactional distance**

Moore developed the theory of transactional distance (Moore, 1993, 2007). In an attempt to define DE, he emphasised that the most significant factor influencing DE is pedagogy, and not the physical or temporal distance that separates the instructor and the learner (Gorsky and Caspi, 2005). For Moore (1993, p. 22), transactional distance is "a physical separation that leads to a psychological and communications gap, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor, and those of the learner". It has been argued that the gap, caused by geographic distance, must be bridged through distinctive procedures in curriculum design, and the facilitation of interactions in the teaching-learning endeavours (Moore and

Kearsley, 1996). Moore suggests that the transactional distance in DE is determined by three interrelated variables: *dialogue*, *structure*, and *learner autonomy*.

### **i. Instructional dialogue**

Dialogue refers to the opportunities for communication between instructors and students determined by the course structure (Gunawardena, 2004). Instructional dialogue is considered as an interaction or a series of interactions which is “purposeful, constructive and valued by each party” (Moore, 1993, p. 24). According to Moore, dialogue has positive qualities and a synergistic character, is supportive in nature, is an instructional process, and is directed towards an improved understanding of the learner. However, the opportunity for dialogue is influenced by the educational philosophy behind the course, the design of the course, the course contents, the personalities of the tutors and learners, cultural and language differences between learners and instructors and the choice of the medium of communication (Moore, 1993; Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

### **ii. Course Structure**

Another variable influencing transactional distance is course structure. Structure refers to the elements of course design and their degree of rigidity or flexibility. Following Moore (2007), structure is concerned with the rigidity or flexibility of the course in terms of course objectives, teaching strategies employed by the course, evaluation and assessment methods used, and the extent to which learner's individual needs are accommodated or addressed in the course. As with dialogue, programme structure is influenced by variables such as the educational philosophy of the teaching organisation, the personalities and other characteristics of learners and their academic level, the nature of course content, the constraints imposed by education institutions, and importantly, by the nature of the communication media that are employed. Moore suggests that DE programmes must structure these teaching processes: presentation of



information; supporting of learner's motivation; stimulating analysis and criticism; giving advice and counselling the learning process; arrangement of practice and evaluation; arrangement for student's creation of knowledge (Moore, 1993, pp. 27-28).

### **iii. Learner autonomy**

Autonomy refers to the extent to which learners are self-directing, self-supporting, and take responsibility for their own learning. It is suggested that teaching programmes should be organised not only according to the extent of structure and dialogue but also according to the extent of learner autonomy.

According to Gorsky and Caspi (2005, p. 3), transactional distance and its relationship with dialogue, structure and autonomy could be summarised as:

- Dialogue and transactional distance are inversely propositional; as one increase, the other decreases. For example, if a DE programme provides more opportunities for interaction between teacher and the students, transactional distance decreases.
- A highly structured DE programme decreases the opportunities for dialogue, which in turn increases the degree of transactional distance. For example, in a highly structured programme such as delivered through TV, teacher-learner interaction is non-existent, which increases the transactional distance.
- Transactional distance and learner autonomy are directly proportional. In other words, the greater the transactional distance, the more autonomy the learner has to exercise.

More importantly, the essence of Moore's theory is that dialogue should connect learners with the structure of course or teaching and learning activities, offering learners opportunities to be actively engage in the learning process. Moore emphasised the importance of three types of interaction in DE courses: *learner-content*, *learner-instructor*, and *learner-learner*. While the

theory provides a broad framework for DE, it does not provide an “operational definition” for any of the variables, and the relationship between these variables is also “ambiguous” (Gorsky and Caspi, 2005, p. 3). Even highly structured DE courses which requires students, as a part of the course, to engage in collaborative activities and tasks, such as project work or seminar paper presentation, can increase interaction and dialogue. Therefore, it is possible that increased structure can lead to more dialogue and interaction (Vrasidas and Glass, 2002). However, the theory suggests that the success of DE programmes is determined by the capability of the institution and the individual instructor to provide appropriate opportunities for interactive and supportive teacher-student dialogue as well as the use of appropriately designed learning materials.

In accordance with Moore’s theory, DE programme designers should provide a balance between the course structure, interaction opportunities, and the autonomy of individual learner, but in practice such balance may not always be possible to achieve, or even prove productive. Because of the emergence of new educational technology and the existence of social-networking sites, the relationship between learner and instructional processes in DE has undergone a radical shift. Such technological development has also a significant impact on the way DE programmes are planned, developed and delivered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In recent years, educators (Garrison et al., 2001; Wenger et al., 2002) emphasised the significance of the collaborative and social nature of learning rather than the traditionally conceptualised notion of learning as a self-directed or autonomous activity. However, I do not intend to justify here that learners on DL courses should bear no responsibility for their learning. Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that the DL provision *per se* gives rise to learner autonomy because, like any formal learning environment, DL environments may also foster or limit the development of each learner’s ability to understand and manage the learning process (White, 2003).

Finally, as with the communication opportunities, a student support service is equally important in DE, which Moore's theory places less emphasis on.

### **3.3.4 Theory of community of practice**

The concept of *community of practice* or *communities of practice* (CoP), a social theory of learning, has become an influential one in social, educational and management sciences in recent years (Barton and Tusting, 2005). The notion of CoP was first introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their seminal work, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, in which they examined the importance of apprenticeship for learning. In apprenticeship learning, interactions and collaboration between newcomers and old-timers bring together different perspectives that contribute to the community's on-going learning (Viskovic, 2006). Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasised that learning in a CoP is characterised by the process of "legitimate peripheral participation" (LPP), where newcomers learn knowledge and skills from more competent members (old-timers) of the community through participation and interaction at the periphery of the community, and gradually move towards full participation, or assimilate into the community (Hara, 2009). However, while learning through LPP, community members participate to varying degrees in social activities, depending on other members' demands on their time, and their degree of interest or expertise in an area (Hanson-Smith, 2006).

The notion of situated learning emphasises that learning is contextually situated. In other words, learning is embodied in social settings and practices (Wenger, 1998), and learning occurs through people interacting in that particular social context (Paquette, 2006). Lave and Wenger proposed that learning should essentially be viewed as a "social process" rather than as the acquisition of "product" by an individual (Hughes, 2007). In other words, rather than viewing learning as the process of internalisation of knowledge transmitted from teachers to learners, learning as a social process perspective considers learning as a form of participation

in social activities or practice (Barton and Tusting, 2005, Lea, 2005), therefore, learning is *situated* within and beyond social and institutional contexts. Learning as a social process optimally involves active engagement, negotiated experiences, and *building connections*: “connections between what is being learned and what is important to the learner, connections between what is being learned and those situations in which it is applied, and connections between the learner and other learners with similar goals” (Barab and Kling, 2004, p. 55).

Initially, Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 42) described the idea of community of practice “largely as an intuitive notion” requiring “a more rigorous treatment”, and they considered the concept to serve primarily as a *heuristic device* - a useful working tool to help understand learning in its social context (Lea, 2005; Kimble and Hildreth, 2006). However, based on the findings of an ethnographic study of clerks in a claims processing unit of a large insurance company, Wenger (1998) further elaborated earlier ideas and considered the notion of the communities of practice as the central concept in the theory of learning. In later works (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), authors proposed that the concept can be applied not only towards apprenticeship learning, but also toward various kinds of learning that occurs within and across wider social and educational contexts.

Wenger and his colleagues (2002, p. 4) define communities of practice as: “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an on-going basis”. According to Hara (2009, p. 26) communities of practice are “collaborative, informal networks that support professional practitioners in their efforts to develop shared understandings and engage in work-relevant knowledge building”.

Wenger points out the nature, scope and forms of CoP vary considerably depending on their purposes and the organisational or educational context in which they are formed. However, all

communities of practice share three fundamental elements: *domain*, *community*, and *practice* (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27). The *domain* denotes a specific area of interest, a specific topic, subject area or a field of knowledge shared by the potential community members (Hara, 2009). Therefore, the cohesive force that holds members of CoP together is a common sense of purpose or common issues of concern, their desire to accumulate knowledge and to enhance their skills, and a shared interest in improving practice or in developing best practices in a specific subject field. Knowledge-sharing and developing a communal repertoire of resources through active participation in collaborative activities of the community is the *raison d'être* of communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 31). Therefore, passion for the domain is crucial (Snyder and Wenger, 2010). According to Wenger (1991), the *community* represents the group of individuals who interact regularly to share ideas and collectively learn together. Community provides avenues for mutual engagement or collaboration and it “creates the social fabric of learning” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 28). Similarly, Kimble and Hildreth (2006) maintain that mutual engagement in common activities binds the members of CoPs together in a single social entity. *Practice* “embodies a certain way of behaving, a perspective on problems and ideas, a thinking style, and even in many cases an ethical stance” along with a shared repertoire of resources (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 39). According to Snyder and Wenger (2010), a community develops and contributes to practice by sharing knowledge and experiences of practitioners and developing a *shared repertoire of resources* in a specific subject area or a domain. The shared repertoire can encompass various communal resources such as experiences, ideas, tools, routines, stories, styles, vocabulary, artefacts, documents and ways of solving typical problems that the community has developed over time (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger and his colleagues maintain that “whereas the domain denotes the topic the community focuses on, the practice is the specific knowledge the community develops, shares and maintains” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 29). Although the later work of

Wenger has concentrated more on management of knowledge and learning in business organisations, the concept of CoP has also been increasingly used in higher education, teacher education and the virtual environment (Little, 2003; Lea, 2005; Gouda and Banks, 2006).

#### **3.3.4.1 Teachers' communities of practice**

Teacher educators have come to recognise the significance of the construct of a community of practice for successful teachers' learning, where teachers as participants in communities are afforded the opportunities to experiment with alternative approaches and strategies, to talk about and share their practice and learn from one another (Barab et al., 2002; Looi et al., 2008). Scholars argue that learning as co-participation in community of practice can provide a useful model for teacher preparation programmes (Barab and Duffy, 2000; Barab et al., 2002). The concept of CoPs is equally useful for teachers' professional development which enables teacher practitioners to transfer good practice and exchange professional knowledge (Gouda and Banks, 2006). According to Gouda and Banks (2006, p. 2), teacher practitioners can also be considered as members of CoP in that "teachers have a joint enterprise, they function as a community, and develop a shared repertoire and resources" such as knowledge, experiences, stories, teaching tools and techniques.

In recent years, growing interest in teachers' learning in community has led to a proliferation of terms to refer to teachers' social learning and their learning networks such as *community of teachers*, *teachers' learning communities*, *community of teacher learners*, *teacher communities of practice*, *communities of instructional practice*, *teacher professional communities* (Grossman et al., 2000; Grossman et al. 2001; Weathers, 2011). For simplicity, in this study, I use the term teacher community of practice (TCoP). TCoP can comprise teacher educators, pre-service and in-service teachers, or professionals from specialised teacher education programmes "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who

deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Barab and Kling (2004, p. 55) describe TCoP as “a persistent, sustained social network of individuals who share and develop an overlapping knowledge base, set of beliefs, values, history and experiences focused on a common practice and/or mutual enterprise”. Furthermore, Hanson-Smith (2006, pp. 302-308) suggests that TCoP represents the following features and that these factors need to be taken into account when considering teachers community of practice within educational institutions:

1. A common purpose or domain of knowledge
2. Generation and sharing of ideas and skills, and reflections on these operations
3. Collaborative praxis: meaningful engagement in the joint activities such as exploration of knowledge and skills through reciprocal mentoring or apprenticeship
4. Social support such as mechanism for introducing new members, peer mentoring and regular face-to-face or online meetings
5. Appropriate tools for communication such as use of information and communication technologies
6. Longevity: provision for community sustainability and continuity of its practice

Additionally, TCoP provides an on-going venue for teacher learning (e.g., Grossman et al., 2001; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). Grossman and his colleagues (2000) further note that as a form of professional community, the teacher community differs significantly from other forms of self-referential community such as a boating community. For example, a gathering of teachers would not be considered a teachers’ professional community. They argue that not only the improvement of professional practice but the improvement of student learning is also a core concern of a TCoP. Furthermore, as lifelong learners and for their intellectual development, “teachers must continue to grow in knowledge, breadth, and understanding and keep up with

changes and paradigm shifts in their disciplines” (Grossman et al., 2000, p. 4). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) also argue that TCoP is essential for teachers’ learning and professional growth, and for improving students’ learning and achievements. According to Grossman and his colleagues (2000), a TCoP can be beneficial in terms of teachers’ intellectual renewal, enriching the possibilities for student learning, retaining talented teachers. The TCoP also tend to come into existence because of teacher practitioners’ interest in the domain and a shared practice, their passion for carrying out a joint enterprise through mutual engagement, and their common objective of improving knowledge and enhancing teaching skills by developing a shared repertoire of resources. However, stability of communities of practice depends on the extent to which community members feel that there is a shared enterprise; shared cultural values, beliefs and norms; mutual accountability for enforcing these norms, and reciprocity/cooperation (Weathers, 2011).

#### **3.3.4.2 Communities of practice: A critical perspective**

Despite the pervasive influence of the notion of community of practice across business, social sciences and educational field, the concept has also stimulated considerable academic debate and it has been the subject of extensive criticism in recent years (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Lea, 2005; Hughes, 2007; Fuller, 2007). While some critics pointed out that the concept is “slippery and elusive” (Barton and Tusting, 2005, p. 6), “ambiguous” and “an underdeveloped concept” (Fuller, 2007, p. 20), others critique the concept for portraying a “romantic” picture (Gee, 2007, p. 206) or “rose-tinted” views of community (Pemberton et al., 2007, p. 63). Edwards (2005, p. 57) argues that “being held up in traffic at the same bottleneck each evening” can create a community of practice as such activities can involve the defining features of community of practice – a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire of communal resources. Therefore, she suggests that “the concept needs tighter



boundaries”. Furthermore, Edwards points out that the community of practice metaphor does not explain how members learn something new or offer an account of how new knowledge is produced – it does not deal with “what is learnt, only what is done” (2005, p. 27).

Arguing that CoP is an underdeveloped concept, Fuller (2007) outlines six themes of critiques which include concerns and doubts about:

1. adequacy of learning as participation metaphor
2. the lack of a precise and rigid definition of communities of practice
3. the transformative ability of communities of practice
4. stability of novice-expert relationships
5. inadequacy in dealing with the different types of trajectories of participation experienced by members
6. failure to acknowledge learning in multiple settings or across communities of practice

To sum up, while several empirical studies have shown that the concept of community of practice is a useful heuristic device to explore teachers’ learning in different educational settings (Barab et al., 2003; Barab and Kling, 2004; Looi et al., 2008), whether or not prospective teachers at CDET had created and benefited from such learning communities is yet to be understood. Community members’ commitment to groups and their desire to sharing knowledge and expertise may be determined by social-cultural and education contexts. For example, members of communities of practice in formal educational contexts, who are working towards a formally assessed qualification, may be reluctant to share knowledge, expertise and resources as members may consider each other as competitors rather than collaborative counterparts and communal repertoire generators. As a student of higher education, I experienced such types of (mal) practice in the Nepalese educational context. A pre-service

teacher community of practice or collaborative knowledge-sharing networks may be useful and effective in supporting DL in Nepal as well. It is against this backdrop, I explore, later in this thesis, whether the students at CDET had formed the community of pre-service teachers and /or whether they perceived such community as useful in facilitating their learning.

Whereas the above mentioned theoretical constructs help elucidate and illuminate the practices of DE in Nepal, the educational programme evaluation guidelines, discussed below, provide some insights into the ways in which the quality of DE programmes can be assessed.

### **3.4 Evaluating distance education programme**

Educational evaluation can be described as a systematic means of collecting and analysing empirical data in order to assess and determine the effectiveness or strengths and weaknesses of training, an educational intervention or an education programme.

#### **3.4.1 Purposes of programme evaluation**

Evaluation of DE programme is essential for its improvement (e.g., formative evaluation), which is conducted during the programme, and for accountability (e.g., summative evaluation), which is carried out after the programme has reached an end point (Kelsey et al., 2009). According to Thompson and Irele (2007, pp. 422-24), educational evaluation is carried out:

- a. to justify the investment of resources;
- b. to measure progress toward programme objectives;
- c. to measure quality and or effectiveness;
- d. to establish a basis for programme improvement;
- e. to provide a basic for strategic decision making

Similarly, assessment of DE programmes is indispensable to “identify specific areas for course improvement”, work the 'bugs' out of the courses, “tweak existing materials, and add more and better technologies and technical features” (Ruhe and Zumbo, 2009 , p. vi). However, my purpose educational programme evaluation is broadly related to assessing the efficiency of how the B.Ed. programme is undertaken, and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

### **3.4.2 Models of programme evaluation**

Several programme evaluation models and a variety of approaches to evaluation are available in the literature, to guide programme evaluation (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2004; Lynch, 2003; Owen and Rogers, 1999; Ruhe and Zumbo, 2009). Some of the programme evaluation models include:

- a. Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) Model (Stufflebeam, 2002; Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2007), which focuses on context evaluation (e.g., planning decision), input evaluation (structuring decision or programme procedures), process evaluation (implementing decision); and product evaluation (assessing outcomes and recycling decision)
- b. The Systems Model (Rossi et al., 2004; Rovai, 2003) for programme evaluation, where evaluation focuses on four aspects of a programme: input evaluation, process evaluation, output evaluation, and impact evaluation.
- c. The unfolding model (Ruhe and Zumbo, 2009)
- d. Kirkpatrick's four-level model (Kirkpatrick, 2006)

The CIPP and the Systems models seem too broad and too complex to apply in a small scale programme evaluation, and I believed that, within the limited time and scope of this research, it was not possible or practical for me to carry out evaluation on the context, input, process,

output, and impact of the DE programme in Nepal. However, I found the unfolding model and Kirkpatrick model, somewhat useful for the purpose of my research as my main concern is to explore the students and tutors experiences and views about relevance and effectiveness of the distance B.Ed. programme. As discussed below, although collecting evidences on all the aspects or levels emphasised by these models is still beyond the scope of this research, they do, however, point out that evidences about the relevance and effectiveness of educational programme can be collected through exploring learners' and tutors' reactions to the course. Inclusion of stakeholders' experiences, and points of view, in the evaluation process is essential. Patton (2002, p. 10) argues that it is important to consider "the stories, experiences, and perceptions of programme participants, beyond simply knowing how many came into the programme, how many completed it, and how many did what afterwards".

Next I provide a brief review of the unfolding model, and the Kirkpatrick four-level model.

#### **3.4.2.1 The unfolding model**

Ruhe and Zumbo (2009) compared seventeen evaluation models. The authors maintain that in order to achieve a detailed, and in-depth picture of the programme as a working system, scientific evidences should be collected on some aspects of 'all four facets' of their *unfolding model: learners' satisfaction* (e.g., about tutor, online discussion group, course package, webpage); *relevance and cost benefits* (e.g., relevance of the course to the learners and educational context, and cost to educational institution and learners); *underlying values* (e.g., course goals and objectives, rhetoric, stakeholders role and influence); and *consequences* (e.g., instructional process, course implementation and delivery media used). They claim that the unfolding model is a "road map" for planning and implementing an evaluation study (Ruhe and Zumbo, 2009, p. 104). However, the evaluation focus and strategies proposed in the unfolding model are particularly related to online course evaluation rather than general

educational programme evaluation, and the model seems to be leaning towards a quantitative research paradigm (Kennedy, 2009) as it suggests mixing quantitative and qualitative methods while collecting the scientific evidences. A more learner-focused approach to the evaluation of educational programmes is proposed by Kirkpatrick (2006).

#### **3.4.2.2 Kirkpatrick's four-level model**

The Kirkpatrick Model (2006) provides a framework for evaluating training, or education programs, or intervention, at four distinct levels. Although it is widely used in the evaluation of training and development in a business world, it is also a well-regarded framework in educational evaluation (Ruhe and Zumbo, 2009). The framework comprises of four levels:

**Level one – participants' reactions:** Evaluation at this level is concerned with students' satisfaction, or reactions to various aspects of an educational programme. In other words, evaluation at this level involves collecting information about learners' views, experiences and reactions to varying aspects of the programme such as the appropriateness of curriculum and course content, quality of learning materials, quality of teaching or training, adequacy of educational infrastructure and resources, student support and feedback system, the use of technological media, administrative and management issues, course satisfaction and so forth. According to Kirkpatrick, every programme should be evaluated at least to this level. As learners' reactions are imperative for providing valuable insight into the effectiveness of educational programme, training or intervention, which in turn helps to identify and improve any shortcomings, this level is directly related to the focus of my research.

**Level two - learning outcomes:** Evaluation at this level is concerned with measuring the degree to which learners extend their knowledge, improve skills and change their attitudes as a consequence of their participation in an educational programme, course, or event. In other

words, it focuses on whether the learners have learned what they are expected to. This may include the student's attainment of the learning objectives and assessment of changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes (Forsyth et al., 1999). For example, using pre-test (before the programme/training) and post-test (after the completion of programme/training) an evaluator can assess the extent to which prospective teachers have acquired subject matter, knowledge and skills included in the teacher education syllabus.

**Level Three - behaviour changes:** The purpose of evaluation at this stage is to focus on measuring the extent to which a change in behaviour occurred, or the extent to which the learners are able to apply what they have learned to a different setting, or to their jobs (Forsyth et al, 1999). In other words, it measures the extent to which teachers are able to apply behaviour, knowledge and skills they have gained. For example, evaluation at this level can assess the impact of in-service teacher training programmes on teachers' performance in the classroom - the changes in job performance as a result of increased knowledge, improvement in skill, or changed attitudes following the programme, training or intervention.

**Level four - results:** Evaluation at this level measures the results, or strategic impacts of the course or learning intervention on the entire organisation. In other words, it measures the success of an educational programme, training, or intervention in terms of its cost-benefit analysis, quality and efficiency.

Although assessing the effectiveness of a training programme remains at the heart of the model, the model does not state anything about the importance of the views of tutors, administrators and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the model does not provide details of the mechanism for the implementation of all four levels.

While all these evaluation frameworks provide insights into educational evaluation, and are useful for comprehensive evaluation of large scale educational programmes and educational

interventions, their usefulness and appropriateness depends on the purpose of the evaluation, and the context in which it is used. In a small scale research with a narrow focus such as this one, collecting data for all different aspects, or levels, proposed by different scholars requires considerable time, expertise, funding and continuous support from stakeholders involved in the programme. Stake (2004) notes that participants' reactions provide valuable information regarding DE programmes and that participant reactions to programme effectiveness is the most commonly used level of evaluation. In a similar vein, Schifter and Monolescu (2004) suggest that evaluation of student and faculty satisfaction is critical for assessing the success of DE programmes. For these reasons, this study also aims to explore participants' educational experiences and perspectives of the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal.

### **3.5 Distance education programme evaluation guidelines**

Kelsey and her colleagues (2009) suggest that best practices of DE can be used as a gold standard for setting the criteria for programme evaluation. In their attempts to devise criteria for DE programme evaluation, various scholars have developed evaluation guidelines and quality indicators of DE programmes (White, 2003; Thompson and Irele, 2007; Moon et al. 2005; Menon et al., 2006). White (2003, p. 75) provides the following criteria for evaluating the quality of DL courses:

1. Learner support
2. The level and amount of engagement with the course
3. On-going evaluation over the life of the programme
4. The content, structure, and context of provision
5. The use made of media
6. The teaching approach
7. The management of provision

8. Contact opportunities
9. Feedback options
10. Level of services and resources

Furthermore, Moon and his colleagues (2005), based on their experience of DE practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, outlined twelve criteria for judging the elements of teacher education programmes conducted through distance mode. Each of these elements can be rated against a clearly described five-point scale ranging from poor to excellent. The criteria are:

1. Clarity on course purpose
2. Alignment of objectives to the purpose, content and learning outcomes
3. Student knowledge and experience of schools and teaching are exploited
4. Accuracy of text informed by contemporary research and scholarship
5. Teacher-education-syllabus requirements are fulfilled
6. Course employs students' prior knowledge
7. Appropriate text styles, use of friendly language, and clear explanation
8. Visually appealing material design
9. Appropriate use of audio-visual media (where provided)
10. Clear continuous, formative, self-evaluative assessment strategies showing appropriate progression into summative assessment
11. Use of well-planned, structured and varied activities to promote student learning
12. Model learning environment created (e.g., use of range of learning resources, 'in-course' student support, appropriate learning environment, and provision of course evaluation and review)



A plethora of literature is available, which provides guidelines for the evaluation of DE programmes, and for developing DL study materials. For example, Moore and Kearsley (1996, p. 76) provide the following variables that determine the effectiveness of DE courses:

- Reasons for students taking the course (e.g., personal development, certification)
- Prior educational background of the students
- Nature of instructional strategies used (e.g., lecture, discussion, problem solving)
- Course pacing (e.g., student determined, teacher defined)
- Amount and type interaction/ learner feedback provided
- Role of tutors/site facilitators
- Preparation and experience of instructors and administrators (minimal to extensive)
- Extent of learner support provided (minimal to extensive)

Similarly, the works of various scholars (Rowntree 2003, 1994a, 1998; Race 1998; Clarke, 2001) particularly deal with designing and assessing DL materials. Similarly, Lockwood (1992, 1998) focuses on the role of self-instructional activities in DL materials, and the key issues in the design and production of SLMs. Rowntree (1990) suggests that while evaluating DL materials, the analyst should consider various aspects of the curriculum materials such as audience, learning objectives, materials content and coverage, style of writing, design and layout, teaching methods employed, assessment provision, and availability and cost of the materials. Clarke (2001) notes that when assessing the quality and suitability of SLMs, fundamental issues to be considered are: target learners, flexibility of materials, student assessment, learning design (e.g., language, summaries, and review exercises), learner support (within the study materials, tutors support, peer support), learning strategies prioritised, and presentation of contents (e.g., layout and design). The ideas of these above mentioned scholars, as well as Moon and his colleagues', were also very informative while designing material

assessment tool for the evaluation of the self-study materials designed for students at CDET (see Appendix, I).

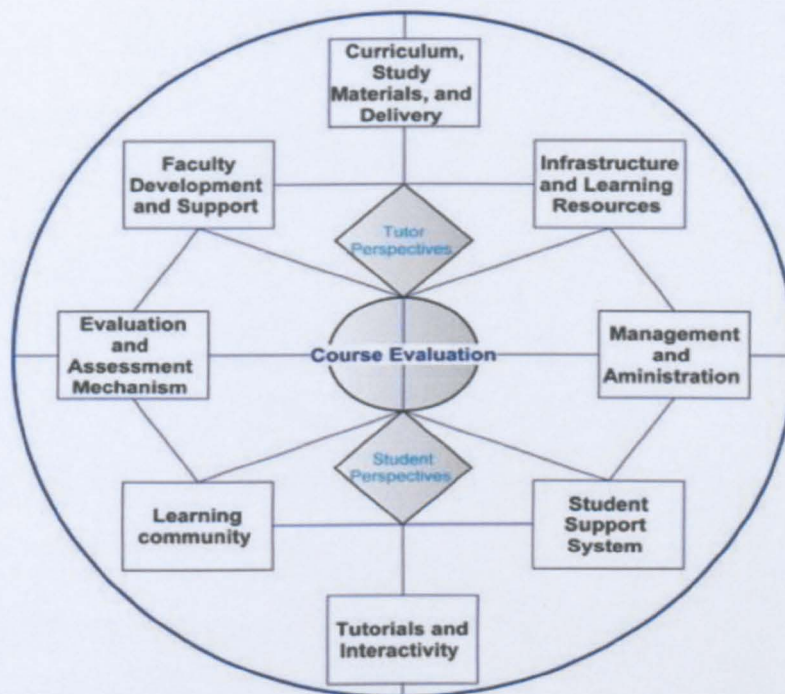
Recurring themes in DE programme assessment benchmarks and guidelines include core areas such as institutional context and commitment, curriculum design and materials development, use of technology, teaching and learning, student and faculty support, and evaluation and assessment. While these guidelines above provide valuable insights into how DE programmes can be evaluated, some other significant elements, which seem to be particularly important in developing context, such as socio-political context, DE infrastructure and logistics, and management and administrative issues appeared to be less emphasised in the quality guidelines discussed above. Nevertheless, a few scholars have considered administrative concerns (Menon et al., 2006; Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Willis, 1993), and infrastructure and cost issues (Moon et al., 2005; Rumble, 1997). Moon and his colleagues (2005) argue that in a developing context, if not planned well, DE programmes would either lead to a “disaster”, or would make people realise that DE provision needs to be “restructured” (Moon et al, 2005, p. 95). Next, I present my new framework for exploring the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal.

### **3.6 A framework for analysing distance education**

After the comprehensive review of benchmarks and best practice guidelines in DE, I recognised that eight core areas (see Figure 1) needed special consideration while assessing the effectiveness of the distance teacher education programmes in a developing context, such as CDET in Nepal. Therefore, in order to explore the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors/founders on the distance B.Ed. course and to assess the ‘quality’ of the programme, I built up a new analytical framework. The framework not only guided the data collection process but also provided a heuristic frame of reference, through which I was able to code the

responses of my research participants into themes. It is also important to note that the iterative process of data analysis and interpretation helped enhance and refine the framework.

Figure 1: A framework for exploring distance education programme



### 3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the theoretical constructs, principles and practices of DE. I reviewed four major theories, and also explored distance programme evaluation models and guidelines appropriate to the DE context of Nepal. Next, I examine the major theories of DE already discussed and conclude this chapter by explaining their relevance to my study.

Holmberg (1983, 2007) made a considerable contribution to the development of DE theory through the concept of *guided didactic conversation*. He argued that DE when carried out through ‘friendly-conversation’, facilitated by ‘well-developed self-instructional materials’, promotes study pleasure and makes study relevant to the individual learner and his/her needs.

Although Holmberg's theory considered the importance of interaction and communication in DE programmes, because of its overemphasis on the role of self-instructional materials, the conversation is most likely to be one-way between the course materials and the learner. Therefore, a critique of Holmberg's ideas is whether a pre-produced learning package, regardless of how well it is written, can be an adequate and effective substitute for two-way communication with tutors (Garrison, 2000). Peters (2001, p. 22) is also critical about the theory and questions "how can authors of academic text be advised to write in a personal style, not to exceed the defined density of information and also to address students emotionally as well?". Additionally, it seems that the assignment-feedback loop, in which tutors provide written feedback and instructions to students, is the only means to student-tutor interaction. Garrison (2000) pointed out that Holmberg failed to recognise that written communication may be qualitatively different from verbal discourse when guiding students. Holmberg (1986, p. 125) himself noted that this is admittedly a 'leaky' theory but maintained that the theory is not devoid of explanatory power in that it advocated a general approach conducive to teaching and learning at a distance. Nevertheless, Holmberg's theoretical ideas are reflected in the design of DL materials produced by OUUK (Haughey et al, 2008). His perspectives have also been followed by various scholars while developing DL materials (e.g., Rowntree, 1990, 1994a; Lockwood, 1992, 1998) making DL materials writing a distinctive genre from that of textbooks.

Peters' (1997, 2007) industrial model recognised the possibility of adopting industrial principles, such as division of labour and mass production, to achieve economies of scale and reduce costs in DE. However, despite its enormous influence on the establishment of open universities (e.g., OUUK), because of the fact that the theory concentrated more on the logistics of DE enterprise, Garrison (Garrison, 2000, p. 6) argued that the industrial model was "not a theory of teaching nor of learning". In fact, it was an organisational model that focused on

systematising the distance education process to realise economies of scale. Therefore, although the industrial model acknowledged structural, organisational and quality concerns in DE, it failed to address the pedagogical aspects. In his theory, DE is considered as a highly objective and mechanical process, and the theory fails to take into account the feelings of isolation and frustration likely to be experienced by the distance learners. In other words, there is no acknowledgement of the need to provide support to distance learners. Additionally, a centralised administration in a DE system may not always be productive in developmental, politically unstable and geographically diverse countries.

Moore (1993, 2007) in this theory emphasised the notion of transactional distance, in which he considered DE as not a geographical phenomenon but as the psychological and communication gap that is likely to create misunderstandings between tutor and learner. Unlike Peters, Moore recognised that the crucial issue in DE is a pedagogical distance, and stressed that in order to minimise the pedagogical distance, “special organisations and teaching procedures” as well as interaction (learner-content, learner-tutor, and learner-learner) is fundamental in DE (Moore, 1991, p. 3). Nevertheless, the theory is contested on the grounds that there is no clarity in the interrelationship amongst the key variables of dialogue, structure and learner autonomy (Garrison, 2000), and that the theory does not provide operational definitions of any of the variables (Gorsky and Caspi, 2005). Although the theory provides a broad framework for DE pedagogy (Moore, 2007) as well as for conceptualising and understanding DE in general (Jung, 2001), the basic propositions of the theory were neither supported nor validated by empirical research findings (Gorsky and Caspi, 2005). Gorsky and Caspi concluded that the theory may be reduced to a single proposition, i.e., as the amount of dialogue increases, transaction distance decreases. Additionally, it has also been suggested that teacher-content and teacher-teacher interaction also need to be considered in distance programme (Anderson and Kuskis, 2007). Further, scholars have pointed out that there is a need to re-appraise the theory and its

propositions in order to consider the social-cultural aspect of the distance learner as social learning is a prominent theme in 21<sup>st</sup> century academic practices (Kang and Gyorke, 2008).

The CoP theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al 2001) emphasises the social dimension of learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning occurs through the engagement in joint enterprises and activities, and through regular interaction with the members of the CoP. As already discussed in section 3.3.4.2, along with its popularity the CoP theory has attracted widespread criticism. Critics claim that the concept is ambiguous and underdeveloped (Fuller, 2007), over emphasises the notion of *community* rather than *practice* (Contu and Wilmott, 2003), and does not address the issues of language, and power relations (Barton and Tusting, 2005). The theory does not consider social conflicts, and the issues of inclusion and exclusion among the members of CoP. Nevertheless, the notion of CoP seems to be useful in facilitating the DL process in a developing, politically unstable and under-resourced context. For example, in such a context through collaboration, regular interaction (either face-to-face or using mobile phones) and sharing of experiences as well as learning resources, prospective teachers can have opportunities to receive help, feedback and acquire new skills from their peers.

After the assessment of four major theories, I conclude that these theories provide broad frameworks for understanding DE in general, and teacher education through distance mode in Nepal in particular. It is important to note, however, that some key elements of the DE system, such as student support services, faculty development and support, assessment and evaluation, were not given much consideration in these theories. Therefore, I have included these elements in my analytical framework.

In the next chapter, I describe my research methodology, data sources and data collection methods, data analysis procedures, problems and issues encountered while conducting fieldwork, and research ethics.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Three, I presented theoretical constructs and guidelines that provided direction for my research. The purpose of this chapter is to justify the choice of research paradigm which informed and shaped my research design – a case study approach. The chapter is divided into five sections. I begin by discussing major philosophical paradigms and delineate my research within the naturalistic-interpretative paradigm. The second section describes the case study approach and provides a rationale for adopting case study to investigate the DL teacher education programme at CDET. Thirdly, I present the data collection methods and instruments employed in this research. In the fourth section, I describe how I analysed the data, and finally, I discuss some practical and ethical issues relevant to my research.

### **4.2 Research paradigm underpinning my study**

The term paradigm refers to a particular set of beliefs and worldviews that guide action (Blaxter et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In other words, researchers' paradigmatic perspectives guide the decisions that researchers make throughout their research process (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108) maintain that a paradigm encompasses three major dimensions: *ontology*, *epistemology* and *methodology*, with three corresponding questions:

- a. Ontological question: What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about?
- b. Epistemological question: What is the relationship between the knower or would-be-knower and what can be known?

- c. Methodological question: How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

Paradigmatic perspectives inform researchers on how to design their research projects, and also largely influence how the researchers collect and interpret the data. The methodological choices made by the researchers are often informed by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of their research perspective. In other words, choosing the research paradigm guides the choice of research methodology, which in turn guides the choice of research methods and techniques for data collection and analysis, again drawing on appropriate literature for support (Clare and Hamilton, 2003). Historically, most scientific inquiry has been influenced by two major contrasting worldviews, namely objectivist-quantitative-positivist and the naturalistic-qualitative-interpretive paradigm (Bryman, 2004, Cohen et al., 2007).

Positivist ontology asserts that there is a single objective reality “out there”, which is independent of the subjective perceptions of the researchers and their subjects (Nunan, 1992). Positivist epistemology assumes that “there is a straightforward one-to-one relationship between things and events in the outside world and people’s knowledge of them” (Stainton-Rogers, 2011, p. 35). Methodologically, positivists argue that it is possible to capture the reality or worlds of facts, in an objective manner or without bias, using scientific methods and techniques such as surveys, experiments and standardised questionnaires. Additionally, the proponents of the positivist philosophy advocate that research findings should be generalisable beyond the immediate context(s) of the study, or to all possible contexts and settings.

By contrast, interpretive ontology assumes the existence of multiple and socially constructed realities and holds that these realities and experiences of people are essentially socially-situated, context-bound, and context-rich (Cohen et al., 2007). That is to say, human beings make sense of their subjective world differently and knowledge is constructed by each of us in



different ways (Thomas, 2009). The interpretivist epistemology assumes that the knower and the known are interactive and inseparable (Cohen et al, 2007). Therefore, rather than seeking objectivity and casual relations or casual explanation, researchers guided by interpretivist epistemology aim to uncover the meaning of human actions, events, and the educational programme in a particular context. Therefore, without deeper understanding of context (e.g., social, political, cultural, educational), researchers may not be able to discover the meanings which participants assign to events, actions and experiences.

However, it is worth noting that “paradigm war” during the 1980s raised two issues: (a) “quantitative and qualitative research are fundamentally different or incompatible”; and (b) interpretative paradigms were also “incompatible” (Denzin, 2009, p. 304). Consequently, many paradigmatic dichotomies were proposed. For example, Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 196) recognised five research paradigms: *positivism*, *post-positivism*, *critical theory*, *constructivism*, and *participatory research* whereas Creswell (2007, p. 19) distinguishes four qualitative research paradigms: *post-positivism*, *constructivism*, *advocacy/participatory*, and *pragmatism*. Furthermore, some researchers recognise feminist research as one of the contemporary research paradigms (Stanley and Wise, 2002). Others have proposed *mixed methods research* as yet another major paradigm in educational research (Johnson et al., 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). It is well beyond the scope of this study to describe these paradigmatic orientations. However, discussions about the varieties of paradigmatic perspectives can be found in the work of various writers (see Blaxter et al, 2006; Blaikie , 2010; Creswall, 2007).

I decided to work within the naturalistic-qualitative-interpretive paradigm, as I believed that it would help illuminate understandings of teacher education through distance mode in Nepal, and allow me to explore how students and tutors at the College of Distance Education and Training (CDET) interpret their educational experiences, how they construct their social

worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). In the following section, I discuss the case study approach, its limitations and the rationale for its choice.

### **4.3 Nature and characteristics of case study research**

The literature contains numerous interpretations of case study. For example, Yin (2009, p. 18) considers case study “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”. Influenced by positivism or quantitative research tradition, Yin (2009) argues that technically the case study inquiry:

- copes with the technicality distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points,
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion,
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis

Whereas scholars influenced by the interpretive paradigm, describe case study as a research that aims to achieve deeper understanding, describing and analysing *a bounded system* (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Case as a bound system is unique and context-sensitive (Patton, 2002) or context-dependent, i.e., conditioned by specific parameters in relation to time, activity and location (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007, p. 73) describes that:

*Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.*

It is relevant to note, however, that a case or a subject of inquiry in educational research can be an event, an individual, a group of people, an educational institution or an educational programme, or even a whole national society (Patton, 2002). Following Yin's definition, a case study approach is distinguished from other research methods by its emphasis on studying a phenomenon or event within its real-life context. Congruent with Yin's definition is the idea of Gillham who defines case study as "a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context; which exists in the here and now" (Gillham, 2000, p. 1). This case study also seeks to explore and illuminate a contemporary phenomenon, a case or bounded system in a particular social, cultural, educational and political context, i.e. teacher education through distance mode in Nepal.

Like Yin, Hammersley and Gomm (2000), contrasting case study with experiment and survey research, considers case study as a "research that investigates a few cases, often one, in considerable depth" in a naturally occurring setting (p. 3). According to Cohen and his colleagues (2007), case studies "strive to portray 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation, to catch the close up reality and 'thick description' of participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for, a situation" (p. 254). Following them, the aim of case study is to produce descriptive and detailed accounts of participants' points of view. However, viewing case study in such a way often creates confusion between case study and ethnography. According to Yin (2009, p. 15), ethnographic studies "usually require a long period of time in the 'field' and emphasise detailed, observational evidence", whereas case study does not depend solely on ethnographic or participant-observation data.

Based on the discussions so far, educational case study in naturalistic research can be understood as an inquiry that involves in-depth exploration of unique educational events, or educational programmes in their real-life context; that employs various data gathering methods

and data sources; and that attempts to obtain deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied and offers detailed and vivid descriptions of the case or cases investigated while writing up the report.

#### 4.3.1 Types of case study

Case studies have been categorised into several different types, based on their *disciplinary orientation* (e.g., historical, psychological, sociological case study), or *by their function* (e.g., whether the overall intent is to describe, interpret or evaluate some phenomenon) (Merriam, 1998, p. 34). Yin (2009), who adopts a positivist stance, has identified three types of case study: *exploratory* case study (used as a pilot study to determine the final protocols, and procedures, or generate hypotheses), *descriptive* case study (used for investigating and providing detailed accounts of phenomena, programmes, or situations), and *explanatory* case study (aimed at causality or testing a hypothesis).

Influenced by the interpretive paradigm, Stake (1995, p. 3) has classified case study as *intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *collective*. *Intrinsic case study* is aimed at gaining deeper understanding of a particular case because the case itself is of interest. In an *instrumental case study* the researcher focuses on a particular case in order to gain insights into the issues or concerns. In a *collective or multisite study* the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, but several cases are used to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), qualitative case studies are *particularistic* (i.e., focus on a particular situation, event, programme, or phenomenon), *descriptive* (i.e., provide a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study), *heuristic* (i.e., illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study). In addition, Sturman (1999, p. 107) identified four types of case studies:

- a. **Ethnographic case study:** It involves a single in-depth study usually by means of participant observation and interviews.

- b. **Action research case study:** It focuses on bringing about change in the case under study.
- c. **Evaluative case study:** It involves the evaluation of educational programmes where, quite often, condensed fieldwork is considered appropriate rather than a lengthy ethnographic approach. Evaluative case studies are “enquiries which are set to explore some educational program, system, project, or event in order to focus on its worthwhileness” (Bassey, 1999, p. 63). Following him, the purpose of evaluative case study is to provide educational actors, or decision makers with information that will help them to judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions.
- d. **Educational case study:** The aim of an educational case study is to enhance the understanding of educational action.

In this regard, drawing on the works of Merriam (1998; 2009) and Sturman (1999), this research can be best described as a ‘*heuristic-evaluative- educational*’ case study, located in the field of educational research, which aims to examine, to obtain deeper insights into and to illuminate, readers understanding of the B.Ed. programme at CDET in Nepal.

#### **4.3.2 Case study research: issues and concerns**

Although case studies have been widely used in educational research, various concerns have been raised regarding case study research such as concern about the issue of generalisation, lack of rigor, and other practical issues.

It has also been argued that case studies provide a poor basis for scientific generalisation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Yin, however, claims that, as opposed to statistical generalisation (as used in survey research), it is possible to make an *analytical generalisation*, in which the investigator strives to generalise a particular set of results from a case study to some broader theory (Yin, 2009, p. 43). On the other hand, Stake maintains that (1995, p. 8) “the real business

of case study is particularisation, not generalisation”. Stake (1995, p. 86) suggests that case study reports provide readers with the *opportunity for vicarious experience* allowing the reader to make *naturalistic generalisations*, as opposed to *scientific generalisation*. Stake claims that *naturalistic generalisations* are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs, or by “vicarious experience” constructed in a way that give the readers feels as if it happened to themselves (ibid.). Stake suggests that case study reports should provide detailed descriptions of the research context(s) in order to develop vicarious experiences for the readers and to give them a sense of “being there” (Stake, 1995, p. 63). In this regard, the importance of case study research lies in its “extension of experience” (Stake, 1978, p. 6). In other words, case studies may provide opportunities to readers to draw their own conclusions, based on the resonance of their own circumstances to that of the context reported in the case study. Case studies are carried out “to make the case understandable” (Stake 1995, p. 85). Therefore, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of the little-known B.Ed. programme offered through distance mode in Nepal. Hence, located within the naturalistic-interpretive orientation, the purpose of this case study is not to generalise, but rather to develop a fuller understanding of the case “in its complexity and entirety, as well as in its context” (Punch, 2009, p. 121). In this regards, Seale (1999, p. 107) argues that:

*...the goal of generalisation is not always an important consideration for research studies. Particular cases may be worth investigating for their own sake. For example, an evaluation study of whether some programme is effective or not may not involve concerns about whether that programme will work elsewhere.*

Another concern is that case studies lack rigor. Those scholars criticising case study often argue that case studies lack rigorous data and they are also criticised for the likelihood of researcher bias influencing what is observed and reported. According to Blaikie (2010, p. 191), a

frequently noted concern is “the possibility of sloppy research and biased findings being represented”. In other words, case studies may be vulnerable to subjectivity and the researcher’s bias, both during the collection of data and during data analysis and interpretation, despite the effort to address reflexivity. Yin (2009, p. 15), also sees “the lack of rigor” as the greatest concern of case study research, and suggests that a case study researcher should follow systematic procedures, and should not allow “equivocal or biased views” to influence the research findings. Merriam (1998, p. 42) suggests that due to the subjective nature of qualitative case study research, the readers of case studies, and the researchers themselves, need to be aware of biases that can affect the findings and conclusions. The third frequently noted complaint about case study is related to practical rather than methodological issues (Blaikie, 2010). In other words, case studies “take too long and they result in massive, unreadable documents” (Yin, 2009, p. 14-15). Furthermore, in case studies, analysis of the data from multiple sources, and presentation of the research report in such a way that provides readers with vicarious experiences in itself is a task not easy to accomplish.

As a means to address the problem of lack of rigor, I, therefore, used *methodological triangulation*<sup>20</sup>, and have also provided *a research biography*. According to Ball (1993), in order to demonstrate methodological rigor, writing of qualitative research reports can be accompanied by a research biography. Ball (1993, p. 46) defines a research biography as “a reflexive account of the conduct of the research which, by drawing on field notes and reflections, recounts the processes, problems, choices, and errors which describe the fieldwork upon which the substantive account is based”.

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<sup>20</sup> Methodological triangulation refers to ‘the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program’ (Patton, 2002, p. 247)

Having discussed some of the issues pertaining to case study research, I will now focus on a number of strategies to overcome these issues and to ensure the quality of naturalistic inquiry. Despite the emergence of diverse perspectives on the conventional concepts of reliability and validity, there is a general consensus among researchers that naturalistic inquirers need to demonstrate that their studies are plausible and credible. Several authors have proposed a diverse range of strategies for establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. The most common strategies, proposed by these scholars, for increasing the trustworthiness of qualitative research are: prolonged engagement, and persistent observation in the field (Miles and Huberman, 1994); triangulation (Merriam, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002); member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); peer review or debriefing (Miles and Huberman, 1994), clarification of researcher's biases and prejudices (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009), and rich and thick description (Geertz, 2003; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Creswell (2007) recommends that qualitative researchers should use in at least two of these techniques.

In this research, to ensure trustworthiness, I worked towards achieving some of the above mentioned criteria. Prior to my fieldwork, I collected and studied the B.Ed. programme syllabus, and gathered details of the institution, its programmes and the target groups, and analysed the SLMs prepared by CDET for its students. I spent over six months in the field observing activities, and talking to students, tutors and administrators. As stated earlier, this study also draws on multiple sources of data such as questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis. While member checking, by sending copies of the interview transcripts to the interviewees, would have added a new dimension to the verification of the transcriptions and



translation, because of the problems with communication<sup>21</sup> in contacting participants, member checks have not been possible. Nonetheless, I followed Kvale's (1996) suggestion that it may be worthwhile to round off the interview mentioning some of the main points learned from it. Therefore, I used the '*Khaja-Samay*' (light snacks-time), immediately after the interviews, as an opportunity to review what had been said, and to summarise my understanding of participants' responses to the interview questions. It was also an important opportunity for participants to react to them, and gave me a chance to seek participants' consensus regarding the main statements in the interviews (Flick, 2007).

### **4.3.3 Rationale for the use of the case study approach**

Despite certain limitations, case study has been considered useful and appropriate to study education programmes (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Therefore, I am of the view that case studies are the most appropriate methods for exploring the lived experiences of students, tutors and or founder members involved in the pre-service teacher education programme in Nepal. According to Cohen and colleagues (2007, p. 254), case studies "strives to portray 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation", "to catch the close-up reality", and achieve detailed and vivid descriptions of participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation, an event, or an educational programme. In other words, case studies are appropriate in gaining an in-depth understanding of the educational practices, in exploring participants' views and their interpretations of actions and events. Finally, through in-depth description and comprehensive analysis, case study "offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences" about the contemporary teacher education programme

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21 Participants' did not have access to email/internet and even where such facilities were available, their use was restricted due to power cuts of up to 18 hours per day in Nepal.

conducted through distance mode in Nepal (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). It has also been suggested that qualitative case studies are particularly ideal in programme or course evaluation (Patton, 2002). As such, Merriam (2009, p. 51) maintains that “case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programmes, and informing policy”. In other words, educational case studies are directed towards bringing about understanding of educational programmes, problems and issues that can help practitioners and teacher educators in making better informed decisions (Bassey, 1999). Therefore, it is believed that case study provides opportunities to explore the complexities and dynamics of the distance teacher education programme in Nepal closely and more clearly, and to make sense of what was happening in the setting. Another benefit of case study is its flexibility to employ multiplicity of data sources and data triangulation. Additionally, as I did not have any job position at CDET, conducting action research, or ethnographic research over an extended period of time was not practical for me.

#### **4.4 Sampling strategies**

In this study, I employed purposive or judgement sampling as well as network or snowball sampling. In purposive sampling, research participants and institutions are selected in a deliberate way for specific purposes (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002, p. 230), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth”. For him, *information-rich cases* are “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (ibid.). Snowball or network sampling, is a commonly used sampling strategy, involving the use of networks to identify further cases or other potential participants (Merriam, 2009; Shelley et al., 2006). In particular, the snowball sampling technique is used in finding “hard-to-reach” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 43)

participants by requesting previously identified participants to recommend a few key names of prospective participants to the study (Patton, 2002).

However, it is important to note that, in the initial stage of my fieldwork, all students were provided with an opportunity to be included in the interviews using 'self-selection' methods. In other words, prior to conducting interviews, all students who expressed an interest in cooperating in the research process, were given a questionnaire in which they were required to answer whether they were keen to participate in interviews to share their views on any specific issues encountered and outline their overall experiences of the course. The majority of students who returned questionnaire expressed their willingness to share their experiences through interviews. Therefore, in later stages, participants for the interviews were approached based on convenience, i.e., based on their time, location and availability (Merriam, 2009).

At this juncture it should be pointed out that during the fieldwork, the key recruitment challenge was to identify and locate the ex-students of the course. By ex-students I mean those who had already obtained their qualifications, or were awaiting the examination results. As these groups did not come to the college, and CDET did not have updated records of their contact details, I decided to use snowball sampling. In this research, the snowball sampling strategy was used in order to identify, and gain access to, a number of ex-students through the recommendations, or referral, of students and tutors involved in the course.

There is no consensus among researchers about the sample size for a qualitative study (Bryman 2004; Kvale 1996; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, Patton (2002, p. 244) maintains that sample size depends on what researchers "want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources". It is recognised that, because of the depth and extent of information sought, qualitative study involves a small number of participants (Creswell,

2005). Because of various practical considerations such as political unrest limiting travel, time, money, and difficulties in recruiting some of the participants (see 4.7 below), I kept the sample size small in this study. This study included interviews with four tutors, five 'ex-students' (i.e., students who had already passed the course, or were waiting for viva), and eight 'current-students' (i.e., students undertaking the course during my fieldwork). The recruiting of further participants was terminated as 'no new information' of relevance to the study was obtained from new participants (Ary et al., 2010).

## **4.5 Research methods and sources of data**

This research employed a multiplicity of research methods for data collection such as document analysis, questionnaire, unstructured observation, and semi-structured interviews.

### **4.5.1 Documents**

Documents, as a source of data, involved various artefacts such as personal documents, official documents derived from the government, student and tutors records, journals, diaries, and other documents from educational institutions. Documents can be valuable in understanding a situation and setting a context (Grady, 1998, p. 24). In this research, the documents collected included the B.Ed. programme syllabus, SLMs, and some examination papers from previous years. During my fieldwork, I also collected other documentary resources from the government, particularly from various units under the Ministry of Education. This secondary data provided deeper insights into the Nepalese political and educational context, enhanced my understandings of the government policy on DE, and helped gain a deeper understanding of teacher education and training programmes in Nepal.

However, the disadvantage of document analysis included problems in gaining access to useful artefacts. As stated earlier, securing access to the documents took a considerable amount of

time, particularly due to the fact that I was trying to obtain permission to use their course materials for my research, as a stranger, from a distance while in the UK.

#### **4.5.2 Questionnaire**

In this study, rather than serve as a major source of information, questionnaires were used to obtain preliminary insights into students' and tutors' views regarding the B.Ed. course. According to Anderson (1998, p 170), "the decision to use a questionnaire is often motivated by a need to collect routine data from a large number of respondents, who may be in one or several locations". Hence, the questionnaires were chosen considering them the cheapest and most convenient means of gathering information, and the views of geographically dispersed students (Fowler, 2009).

The draft questionnaires, in this study, were piloted to six fellow PhD students in order to identify possible ambiguities, identify redundancy and repetition, and eliminate any errors. All the pilot participants were provided with feedback forms. The fellow researchers provided feedback on the complexity of the language used, identified some errors and double-barrelled questions, and also suggested distributing positive and negative statements equally to make sure that respondents do not select the options randomly. In this regard, Bryman (2004) and Robson (2002) provide a set of rules for devising questions such as keeping the language simple, avoiding ambiguous terms in questions, keeping questions short, avoiding double-barrelled questions, and avoiding the use of the double negative. The questionnaires included both closed and open-ended questions.

The questionnaire aimed to provide a framework for the interview and was also used as a tool to identify participants for the interview. Therefore, at the end of the questionnaire, students and tutors were asked about their willingness to participate in interviews. I delivered and collected the questionnaires in person. Although, I distributed over 250 questionnaires, I

managed to collect only 59 completed questionnaires from ‘current students’, three from ‘ex-students’, and four from tutors. I discuss some of the issues related to questionnaire distribution and collection in section 4.7.3 below. Due to the lack of space, only one sample of the student questionnaire is included in this thesis (see Appendix II) and there were not major differences in these different questionnaires.

### **4.5.3 Participant observation**

According to Bryman (2004, p. 542), participant observation is a qualitative data collection method in which the researcher immerses himself or herself in a research setting “observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversation both between others and with the field worker, and asking questions”. Participant observation is a highly useful strategy which helps “to describe what happens, who or what are involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why things happen as they do from the point of view of the participants” (Boeije, 2010, p. 59). It helps in-depth exploration of various aspects of the educational institution or community being studied (Bryman, 2004) which may not be possible by using other methods. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 102) suggest that “there are distinct advantages in combining participant observation with interviews; in particular, data from each can be used to illuminate the other”.

Establishing a relationship of trust with CDET authorities, tutors, and its study centre co-ordinators was crucial in negotiating the observer’s roles and was a vital part of the research process (Darlington and Scott, 2002). Therefore, during my initial visits I spent at least 2 days in each centre. These visits involved informal talks with the centre co-coordinators and available tutors about my research project. After my research was clearly explained to them, I was allowed to observe the activities in the college, and to participate in contact session tutorials. The students were informed of and were aware of my presence. I personally asked

the tutors if I could observe their tutorials even though they were to be informed about the observation by the centre co-ordinators, or the campus Chief. I was also invited to a few staff meetings where the college authorities sought my ideas on certain issues.

During tutorial observations, I acted very much as a non-participant observer<sup>22</sup>, tried to refrain from providing my views, and was constantly aware that my presence could change the normal status quo. Nonetheless, I listened to stories of students, tutors and administrative staff, and engaged in informal conversations during the lunch break, or after the tutorial sessions. These informal discussions provided valuable insights into the educational culture, learning environment, and issues and problems students and tutors were facing while teaching and learning, as well as building and maintaining rapport with them. I observed and participated in at least 2 to 3 contact sessions at each CDET local study centre.

#### **4.5.4 Interviews**

Interviewing is considered to be one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004; Mason, 2002; Robson, 2002). Qualitative researchers use interviews to explore students' and tutors' experiences and interpretations through special kinds of conversations, or speech events (Hatch, 2002). Depending on the flexibility of content and structure, interviews can be classified as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Merriam, 1998). Structured interviews involve a fixed interview structure, rigidity in interview content, and strict adherence to the order of interview questions, and to the wording of the questions, usually in a predetermined order (Robson, 2002). Unstructured are almost the complete opposite, in that such interviews entail flexible structures and styles of questioning,

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<sup>22</sup> I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible and did not participate in the interactions

can be completely informal, and the wording and sequencing of questions can vary from interview to interview (Bryman, 2004; Robson, 2002).

The semi-structured interviewing follows a sequence of themes to be covered, and a series of questions in the form of an interview guide, but it provides flexibility in the way questions are asked (Bryman, 2004; Kvale, 1996). For example, the researcher can change the wording of questions and provide explanation, remove questions if considered inappropriate with a particular interviewee or even ask different questions for different interviewees, and probe for more specific answers or ask further questions in response to an interviewee's replies (Bryman, 2004; Robson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews offer a flexible and adaptable way of finding in-depth information about participants' perceptions, attitudes and experiences about a particular educational institution, or event, and allow the researcher to probe for more details in order to ensure that participants are interpreting questions the way in which they were intended.

According to Kvale (1996, p. 1), a qualitative research interviews seek "to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world". In my research, in order to explore the views and experiences of students and tutors on the distance B.Ed. course in Nepal and to gain deeper understanding of the programme, semi-structured interviews were used. My interview schedule included a series of headings, and some open-ended questions which were accompanied by prompts intended to probe in case participants did not flag-up anticipated issues. The interview guide served as a reminder of core aspects of the questions to be asked (see Appendices III and IV). All interviews were conducted in Nepali, recorded using a digital recorder, transcribed, and then translated into English. I conducted 17 interviews which included eight 'current students', five 'ex-students' and four tutors (see Appendix V for participant profiles).



Interviews were arranged at locations which were convenient for the interviewees and where they would feel comfortable and relaxed (Lodico et al., 2010). I deliberately avoided conducting interviews in CDET, or its local centre, not only because an interview would likely be disturbed but also due to the interviewees' physical and/or mental state of being tired after a 7-8 hour long contact session tutorial. Most of the informants were interviewed at their offices, or in hotel rooms. However, in this study, two female participants were interviewed in their homes because of cultural reasons. In Nepal, it is considered culturally inappropriate to conduct interviews with female participants in hotels, or in rooms with the door closed or to request them to attend interviews in places that require a long journey. Therefore, interviews with female participants were conducted with the door open, even though doing so created a possibility of being disturbed during the interviews. It was my ethical, professional and moral duty to respect and maintain appropriate social norms and behaviour expected in Nepalese society.

## **4.6 Data analysis procedures**

### **4.6.1 Documentary data**

The main documentary source for this research was the distance B.Ed. programme syllabus, and self-study materials provided to the students. Prior to my fieldwork, I developed an evaluation guideline for the review of study materials (see Appendix I). As noted in Chapter Three, the materials evaluation process was informed by the literature on designing and assessing the quality of DL materials, such as Moon and colleagues (2005), Rowntree (1992, 1994a, 1998), Lockwood and Clarke (2001). In the next chapter, I explore some of the issues and concerns pertaining to the materials, based on my analysis, and the views and experiences of students and tutors.

#### **4.6.2 Observation data**

During my visits to research sites, I took field notes about activities, events and incidents as they unfolded in each situation. These notes were very useful in expanding my understanding of the B.Ed. programme and were used as heuristic devices to illuminate interviews. The observation notes included my thoughts, feelings, experiences and reflections associated with my fieldwork, such as travel to local study centres, difficulties and challenges I faced, contact session activities, and issues and concerns raised by students and tutors during informal conversations.

#### **4.6.3 Questionnaire data**

My questionnaire data contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions were meant to provide opportunities for respondents to express what they thought and felt in their own words, and to obtain additional information about the distance teacher training programme, particularly about strengths and weakness of the programme, what students and tutors liked and disliked, and difficulties and challenges they faced while undertaking the course. Responses to the open ended-questions were coded in Nvivo for analysis. On the contrary, closed questions provided respondents with options from which to select an answer such as multiple choice questions, or scales such as strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) for example. These closed-ended questions helped limit the respondents to predetermined alternatives, reduced ambiguity in responses and could be more easily processed and analysed than open-ended questions (Shelley et al., 2006).

In this study, I used the professional version of SurveyMonkey (SM) online application to store, code and analyse the responses to closed-ended questions. The data were secured and encrypted. As I had used the SM application to design and pilot the questionnaire with my fellow colleagues, I considered that feeding my modified questionnaire into the SM interface

for coding and analysis was a feasible way forward. The SM platform allowed me to directly code and analyse the data. Additionally, although I encountered some file conversion issues, SM even permitted the export of data onto spread sheet, or to download the results as a PDF file.

In this study, I reported all the questionnaire responses provided by ‘current students’ (n=59). Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, because of the considerably low number of questionnaire responses from tutors (n=4) and ‘ex-students’ (n=3) I did not report their responses to closed-ended questions. However, I imported the open-ended questionnaire responses into NVivo for analysis.

Additionally, some of the questions in the questionnaire were related to *teachers’ professional knowledge* (Banks et al., 1999; Banks et al., 2005; Leach and Moon, 2000) as I wanted to explore what knowledge and skills were prioritised on the course, and the knowledge and skills that were considered ‘important’ by prospective teachers in the Nepalese educational context. However, as an overwhelming majority of respondents were taking the course for other purposes rather than for teaching, I did not report ‘teachers’ professional knowledge’ related responses in this study.

#### **4.6.4 Interview data**

In this research, the first step in the analysis of interview data involved translating the interviews from Nepali into English. Transcribing, translating and analysing interviews can be time-consuming and expensive, and the quality of interviews depends on the skills of the interviewers (Patton, 2002). According to Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 11) “issues associated with translating from one language into another are much more complex than transcribing because they involve the more subtle issue of connotation and meaning”. They maintain that the generation of “accurate and meaningful data”, through the translation

processes, and the preservation of original meaning in the translated text, is paramount. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 11), further highlight some issues of translating interviews:

- a. *If you have translated from another language into English, which language constitutes the direct quotes? Can you use translated words as a direct quote?*
- b. *How do you signal that a translation is accurate, and captures the subtle meanings of the original language?*

I think more important concerns may be the issues of subjectivity in translation, and issues of preserving meaning in translation, particularly when direct translation of a phrase in the target language, is not possible. Therefore, where direct translation was not possible, the equivalent terminology or phrase was not available in the target language, or in order to keep the participants' emphasis on certain issues intact, I borrow words and phrases used by the participant in Nepali language and provide a literal meaning. To establish the accuracy and subtlety of translation, three interview transcripts with English translation of the interviews were shown to a Nepali teacher educator, who had acquired a degree from a UK university, for his appraisal. As no significant gap in translation was identified, other transcripts were not verified.

The next step involved the reading of four interview transcripts over and over again, "eyeballing" or "pawing" through the interview texts with highlighting pens; looking for repetitions, similarities and differences (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, pp. 57-71); and jotting down possible codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and emerging concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Comparison of codes and recurring patterns, or themes, in these interviews were instrumental in refining initial categories. I used qualitative data analysis software NVivo 9 to systematically store, code, organise and analyse the rest of the interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire responses (OQR). In NVivo potential themes were coded to certain

categories or ‘nodes’ and NVivo would automatically generate coding incidents or frequency, referred to as ‘references’. During the coding process, I gave a label or name to each node, and each node was linked to a number of different sources (such as interview transcripts or open-ended questionnaire responses) that were coded in a particular category. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, some nodes contained more coding references than others, which helped identify key emerging themes and issues.

Themes

Name	Sources	References
Administration and Management	16	177
Assessment and Feedback Mechanism	16	126
Being a distance student	15	211
Curriculum and Study Materials	16	216
Barriers to curriculum update	6	8
Course design	12	23
Curriculum update and review	12	23
Nature of study materials and content presentation	16	137
Relevance and usefulness of the course	11	22
Educational Infrastructure and learning resources	16	224
Faculty development and Training	13	42
Institutional Support from Government	10	25
Likes and Dislikes	16	312
Political Issues Affecting the Programme	12	35
Reasons for involvement in DE	12	51
Student Support Services	15	245
Suggestion for Improvement	16	240
Tutor Expertise and Tutorials	16	146

Figure 2: Sample coding framework

During the third stage, the most occurring themes were retained. I some cases categories were either integrated into a common parent node, or central theme, or split into different categories, and some of the subordinate themes were dropped from the analysis as they were not considered significant (Willig, 2008). However, it is important to note that some of the node classifications were also informed by the conceptual framework devised in Chapter Three and were mapped against my research questions. Finally, keeping my research questions in mind, these key categories were assigned to more broad categories such as students’ experiences and

perspectives, and tutors' experiences and perspectives, on various aspects of the programme (cf. Chapter Five, Six, and Seven). Next, I discuss some of the difficulties that I encountered during my fieldwork.

## **4.7 Research biography**

My fieldwork was full of anxieties, uncertainties and challenges, and I had to be personally flexible and open to change. Some of the key problems that I faced while in the field are highlighted below.

### **4.7.1 Negotiating access to documents and institutions**

Blaxter and her colleagues (2006) recognise that access issues may involve: negotiating access to documents, institutions, and people. During the first stage of my research, I negotiated access to CDET but negotiating the access was a very slow process and proved very challenging, particularly because I was negotiating access from the UK, and also because I was a stranger to the institution and had no acquaintance with the CDET authorities. The main purpose of this initial data collection phase was to obtain permission from the research site, gather information about the programme and its target group, and collect SLMs as well as the course syllabus prepared by CDET for its students. The negotiation process was informal in nature, but was time-consuming. As I shared the same socio-cultural, socio-political and educational background with the gatekeepers responsible for allowing me access to the site, I was aware of the danger that negotiating access through direct phone calls may have been considered impolite by them. They could have been suspicious of my research motives, restricted access to the college, or refrained from cooperating during my fieldwork. It would not have been a surprise if the authorities perceived this stranger as a threat to their institution. It was, therefore, very important for me, at this stage, to gain adequate understanding of the college, to make

acquaintances and to establish a relationship of trust with the college authorities. Rather than making phone calls, and sending a formal letter to the college authorities about my research project, or presenting myself straightaway as a researcher, I considered that the probability of obtaining access by using my personal contacts, and previous connections, in Nepal was high. I, therefore, decided to approach the college authorities using my personal network of teacher educators who taught me at Tribhuvan University (TU), fellow TU graduates, and family members in Nepal. One particular feature of the Nepalese socio-cultural context is the fact that obstacles and complexities cannot easily be avoided without the help and support of someone who is well-acquainted with the 'gatekeepers'. Identifying the right person from the existing network who could 'convince' the relevant authorities, however, was a daunting task. After spending time making phone calls and exchanging e-mails, I was pleased to learn that a professor I knew had been a classmate of one of the founder members of the CDET. Besides, they had also worked together at the Faculty of Education at TU. My personal links with the professor was advantageous in making contact with key personnel at CDET.

After weeks of email communication, it was a great relief to hear that the principal of the college was interested in my research project and assured me of his cooperation in the research process. Later, through the use of my friends' contacts, I was successful in obtaining Self-Learning-Materials (SLMs), the course syllabus, and some sample end-of-year examination questions. I wanted to obtain a general understanding of the teacher education programme prior to my fieldwork, particularly with regard to the nature of the course, type of study materials used, student support provision within the materials, and nature of the assessment and examination system.

During the second stage of my field work, I visited CDET in Kathmandu. Through the help of the college principal, access to other local centres was also negotiated. Although I set out to

study all six CDET centres, I ended up gaining access to only five of them, including the main centre, Kathmandu. However, one CDET centre, located in the far *Terai*, was not accessible due to constant political unrest in the area, which posed problems in travelling by road.

#### **4.7.2 Modifications in questionnaires**

My initial plan was to gather preliminary information using questionnaire from the students enrolled at CDET for the English language teaching course. While negotiating access from the UK, I was informed that CDET would enrol over 150 prospective English teachers on the course in the relevant academic year. However, while on the research site, I learned that only around eight students (CDET had not yet received information from all study centres) had enrolled on the English Language Teaching (ELT) course. I was more surprised to discover that the majority of students enrolled on the B.Ed. programme were government employees, who were ‘never’ going to be involved in the teaching profession. As my initial plan of exploring the views and experiences of prospective English teachers was not going to work, I was left with no option but to change the questionnaire. I, therefore, decided to make necessary changes, so that it could be made more generic and could be administered to students studying other subjects such as Mathematics, or School Supervision and Management. The modifications of the questionnaire required considerable effort and I had to pilot it to ‘identical groups’ to make sure that the questions were understood by the target groups. I piloted the revised questionnaire to ten students studying M.Ed. at Tribhuvan University. These students indicated that the language used in the questionnaire was difficult for them to comprehend. I accepted their feedback but due to the 18-hours of electricity shortage in a day, I had constant difficulty in finding an appropriate place, to have a regular supply of power, to modify the questionnaire. Finally, a friend of mine, working in a private hospital where the power supply was backed up by generators, managed to create a space in his office for me to work.



### **4.7.3 Distribution and collection of the questionnaire**

Due to the lack of an efficient and reliable postal system in Nepal, it was not possible to deliver the questionnaires through the post. Furthermore, I wanted to distribute the questionnaire to the current students only after they had attended at least two contact sessions. Unfortunately, the distribution of the student questionnaire at contact sessions could not always be accomplished, as planned, because as stated earlier, due to political turmoil, some of the scheduled sessions could not be attended, or they were cancelled. I, therefore, had to travel to students' homes and offices to deliver and collect the questionnaire. Travelling to schools, colleges, government offices and even to respondents' homes required a flexible mode of transport. Public buses were not accessible in all locations, therefore, I had to hire a motorbike to distribute and collect the completed questionnaire. Regular follow-up phone calls were also required, to make sure that the respondents were going to complete the questionnaire. On occasion, I had to travel for 3-4 hours to a student's house, or office, just to hand-in or collect a questionnaire. Travelling on a motorbike provided freedom and flexibility although it was equally expensive, and due to some road conditions, we encountered flat tyres, on occasion, causing lengthy delays. Some of the completed questionnaires could not be collected, as either the respondent was inaccessible or it was too difficult to travel to their places due to financial reasons and Bandas closing routes.

### **4.7.4 Gaining access to participants' office locations**

Some of the participants requested that I collected completed questionnaire from their office, and others preferred to be interviewed at their workplace, but gaining access to their office locations was stressful. For example, some of the interviewees were working in government ministries located in Singha Durbar, the central government secretariat. Gates of Singha used to be open for the general public only after 2 p.m., and all visitors were required to have a

‘pass’ to gain entry to the complex. However, the process of obtaining a pass was of a political, bureaucratic and technical nature, which required time and effort. Technically, to obtain a pass I needed to get someone, from the ministry or department I was visiting, to send my name and the pass to the respective gate/window. On some occasions, my participants would send my name across but due to power cuts or ‘load-shedding’, it would not arrive at the gate and I would have to wait until the power supply resumed. On other occasions, security personnel would tell me that my name wasn’t on the list, and I had to repeatedly call the participants to ensure that I could get access.

#### **4.7.5 Political events affecting travel plans**

As described in Chapter Two, political crisis, unrest and disorder in Nepal continue to deepen, and spontaneous Banda and demonstrations in the streets keep on affecting normal life across the country. Due to the constant political instability and unrest in Nepal, my research fieldwork was stressful, full of challenges, tension, and dilemmas. It was impossible to follow my research plans and my plan had to be adjusted according to prevailing political events. During my fieldwork, the political situation and other events started to unfold differently from anything I had anticipated. Visits to study centres needed to be aligned with pre-announced political events such as Band and strikes, and often political events occurred without any prior notice (República, 2009). Encounters with 6/7 ‘Nepal Bandas’, on average, and many other regional Bandas in a month seemed quite a common phenomenon in Nepal during my fieldwork.

As discussed in Chapter Two, it was not only political parties who call for the Bandas and demonstrations which cripple everyday life. For example, while I was travelling, by bus, to the Pokhara Centre from Kathmandu, to attend the first 3-day tutorial session, an unanticipated Banda brought life to a grinding halt in Damauli Bazar, an urban town located between Kathmandu and Pokhara, and passengers were forced to get off the bus.



**Figure 3 : People blocking roads**

I, later, learned that the Banda had been enforced by agitating ethnic groups who burnt down a passenger bus and consequently smashed windows of buses that tried to defy the Banda. Due to the Banda, I was unable to attend the first day of the contact session at CDET centre Pokhara. Therefore, as a novice researcher, managing my ‘research self’ required “careful planning and sensitive and reflective involvement’ as well as appropriate “adaptation of the research self to the requirements of the field” (Ball, 1993, p. 33).

#### **4.7.6 Incidents affecting interviews**

Besides modifications made to my original research plans, and cancellation of scheduled events (such as contact sessions participation), a few interviews with the students and tutors also had to be rescheduled. As can be seen in the picture below, when I reached the entrance to the Ministry of Education (MoE), police were deployed to control student protests outside the MoE



and I was denied entry into the site. Therefore, my scheduled interview with one of the participants had to be cancelled, and yet just an hour before there was no sign of such a protest.



Figure 4 : Student protest outside MoE

Additionally, two tutors from CDET Chitwan centre declined to participate in interviews citing their ‘inadequate experience’ of the course, and some tutors could not be recruited for the interviews due to their busy work schedules. Two individuals who were willing to participate in interviews could not be reached as they were transferred to remote and hard-to-reach locations for their work. One ex-student, who was contacted through her colleague at a school she was teaching in, refused to participate in the interview. Her colleague explained that due to her fear and suspicion of strangers, or those whom she was not accounted with, she did not grant me access to her home. Constant political instability, incidents of abduction and extortion by various armed groups and criminal gangs have become a way of life for people in Nepal which in turn have created fear and tension among ordinary people.

4.7.7 The issue of researcher roles

During the first few weeks of my investigation, I experienced some problems as a result of my status as an academic and a researcher. Although I shared a socio-cultural background, as an educated person pursuing a doctoral degree in western society put me in some rather awkward

situations. For example, during my first visits to CDET centres, centre co-ordinators were a bit suspicious and I could sense that they felt threatened by my academic background and researcher status. Two regional centre co-ordinators did not want to provide time for me, in my initial visits to the centres, and therefore I talked to staff members about my research project, and left them an information-leaflet which explained my research. During my field visit, some centres sometimes remained closed citing the lack of administrative staff. Some of the centre co-ordinators were worried that I might report something negative to CDET, which would lead to the cancellation of the centre affiliation. For instance, when I visited the Nuwakot centre to take part in the first contact session, the centre co-ordinator clearly articulated such concerns and requested that I did not report any '*kami-kamjori*' (weaknesses or faults) to the higher authorities. Nonetheless, after I had personally met with the centre co-ordinator and explained my research in detail, the centre agreed to cooperate with the research process. During my initial visits, some tutors were hesitant about my ideas of observing their tutorials, I therefore tried hard to establish and maintain trust and a good relationship with them. Lichtman (2010) suggests that researchers are required to learn to develop and establish a rapport in order to generate meaningful and useful data. The suspicions dissipated as contact and visits to the CDET centres increased.

Another issue was concerning the students' and tutors' expectations of me. As a teacher educator and a researcher, they seemed have perceived me as an 'expert'. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 61) argue that research participants tend to view researcher as "the expert" (a professional or academic who can provide advice and sort things out), or "the critic" (an evaluator of the situation). For example, one of the students wanted guidance in writing his assignments, while another was wondering if I could possibly find a scholarship, or DL M.Phil. programme in the UK. Because of my M.Ed. qualification, some of the students wanted me to explain some of the topics not covered by, or not understood during, the contact session

tutorials. As I was a student pursuing higher education from a reputed DE institution and a person researching DE practices, one tutor, who was also the campus chief in a government college, requested that I deliver a lecture to M.Ed. students on approaches to ODE. These M.Ed. students were required to study a unit on approaches to ODE in their Foundations of Education course. Turning down the request would be considered impolite and such an act would also create potential barriers to receiving cooperation. Additionally, because of my English Language Teaching qualifications, one English tutor was wondering if I had any books on ELT recently published by western authors. Furthermore, the principal and one of the founder members of CDET expressed his interest in visiting the Open University to observe how it operates and to learn from its experiences. I accepted some of the requests by tutors (e.g., lending books, making a presentation at one public campus on approaches to ODE). However, I normally provided advice and suggestions (e.g., explaining unclear ideas and concepts of SLMs, developing tools to carryout school survey) to students in groups and most of the time, I positioned myself among the students as 'one of them'. I was constantly aware of the impact of my status on the participants' understanding of my role, and on the relationship exhibited in the field.

It is also worth noting that some of the CDET authorities were concerned with my political background. Particularly during the first weeks of my visits to CDET centres, they were a bit sceptical about my presence. The authorities might have perceived me as a member of some political party, spying on their activities or planning to ask for a donation for the party. As discussed in Chapter Two, many instances in the past illustrate that political parties and armed groups issue letters for donations, and have forced colleges to shut down, if their demands are not fulfilled. However, after trust and relationship was established, the issues of political status vanished.

In all forms of qualitative research the “researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Researchers as instruments have shortcomings, assumptions, presuppositions and bias, and are affected by their culture, education, group membership, gender, personal disposition or other personal and environmental factors (Holloway, 1997). I was not an exception. Researchers need to recognise that it is often difficult to eliminate bias but it is possible to minimise it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In this research, I was constantly aware of my presuppositions, values, expectations and bias and the likely impact these predispositions might have on my study and study findings. However, my identity and aforementioned attributes might have impacted not only on the way participants perceived me, but also on the ways they behaved towards me, or responded to my questions.

#### **4.7.8 Reflections**

Although Masters of Research (MRes) degree, in many respects, helped me develop a broader perspective on research methodologies and skills needed in undertaking research, demonstrating my knowledge and research skills during the fieldwork was a different matter. Nothing really prepared me for handling the wide range of difficulties I would encounter in the field. For example, although I set out to explore views and experiences of prospective teachers of English as well as tutors teaching English Language Teaching (ELT) course, while in the field, I realised that the majority of students were taking the course as a means to job promotion rather than for entering the teaching profession, and only eight students were undertaking ELT as a specialisation subject. Additionally, some of these prospective teachers of English were enrolled at a centre that I could not access. Therefore, I was confused as to the focus and direction of my research.

As described above, my research plans required modification, and I needed to extend the focus of my research so that I could include wider aspects and recruit students from any subject of

specialisation. As a result, the student and tutor questionnaires were amended, shifting focus from ELT to other subjects within the programme. Additionally, because of the time gap between UK and Nepal, frequent Banda and strikes, and lack of a regular electricity supply, I was not able to easily access my supervisors, and consequently, I felt isolated and frustrated at times.

Furthermore, while researching in a politically unstable situation, I began to realise that it was inevitable that I had to learn to adapt to this complex and unpredictable socio-political environment. Often pre-scheduled contact session tutorials and study centre visits were cancelled or affected, due to Banda and other political events, which created constant worry and led to anxieties during my fieldwork. Nonetheless, as some of the CDET centres were located in cities in beautiful areas, when not affected by Banda during the journey, travelling on a motorbike to these cities used to be a refreshing experience.

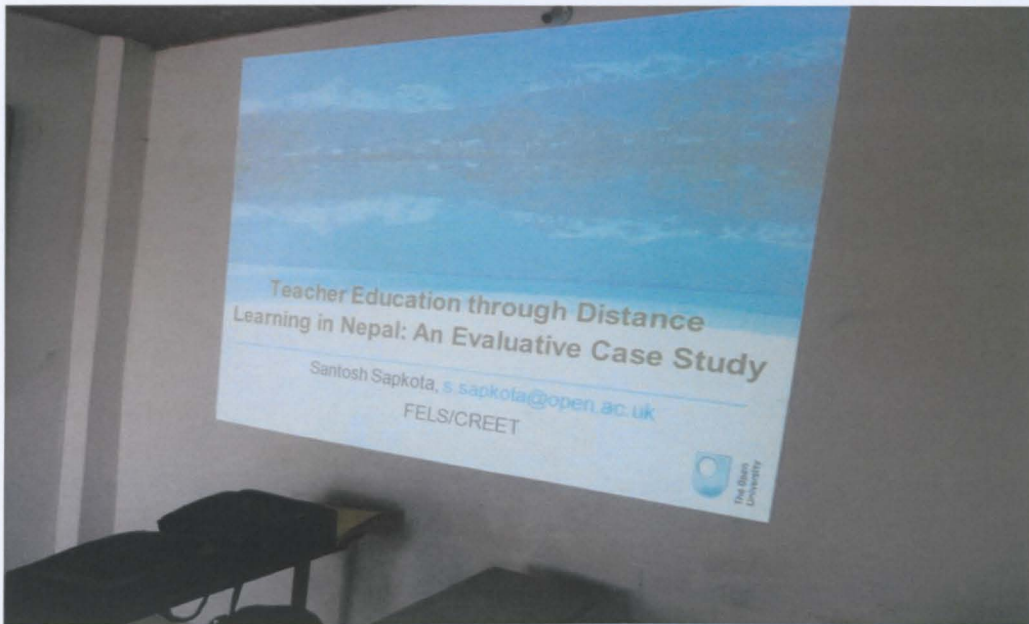
Although the early days of my fieldwork were stressful and daunting, after spending some weeks in the field, I recognised that I needed to adopt a more flexible approach and to be more tentative. More importantly, through reflection on the variety of experiences and challenges I encountered in the field, I realised that I had learned to deal with emerging difficulties and problems, and that I was improving my research skills. For example, as a novice researcher, having no prior experience of conducting interviews, and yet after reflecting on experiences of earlier interviews, I realised that I had undergone a learning curve in this process. I listened to a few interviews, before going ahead and conducting more, and this helped shape the direction of further interviews. Through experiences accumulated in earlier interviews or a learning-by-doing approach, I became more comfortable and confident in the interview process and reflections on my experiences helped to make sure that I was asking relevant questions, and also to ensure that the informants understood my questions. I also realised that I needed to



rephrase, or explain a number of questions in simpler terms. Because of the lack of prior experience with Information and Communication Technology (ICT), some of the informants had difficulty responding to the questions particularly relating to the use of ICT, and the kinds of student support systems in DE programmes. I also noticed that I needed to use more probing questions for encouraging participants to clarify their responses such as “That’s interesting, could you tell me a little more about that?”, “What do you mean by that?”. Next, I consider the ethics relevant to my research.

## **4.8 Ethical considerations**

It is crucial for researchers to adhere to codes and principles of research ethics while planning, conducting and reporting the results of the research studies. Therefore, prior to my fieldwork, formal approval was sought from the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC). In my research, participants were well informed about the key ethical issues, such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, risks and benefits, withdrawal from research, and data storage. Using PowerPoint presentations (see Figure 5 below) and an ‘information leaflet’ (see Appendix VI), I provided opportunities for my participants to become familiar with my study, and to ask any questions about my research project, before seeking their consent. In order to provide information about my research project to those students who missed contact sessions for various reasons, the information leaflets, along with my visiting card, were displayed on the notice boards of the college. I also provided them “a cooling off period” (Darlington and Scott, 2002, p. 56) in which they could decide whether or not to participate in the study. The interviews with students and tutors/staff members were conducted after they had returned the completed questionnaire. Almost all the students who returned a completed questionnaire expressed their willingness to participate in interviews and to cooperate with my research.



**Figure 5: PowerPoint presentation about my research project**

Although ex-students were also provided with the information leaflets, I only had a couple of opportunities to meet them prior to the interviews. To obtain participants' cooperation, to gain trust and to reduce the level of perceived threat, when contacting the ex-students for the first time, I always stated that 'I was given your name by X'.

Interviews were preceded by a '*briefing*' and followed by '*debriefing*' (Kvale, 1996, pp. 127-128). During the '*Chiya-Gaff*' (tea time chitchat), before the interviews, I reminded participants about my research. It is important to consider that without participants' trust or some sense of connection with the researcher, participants "are unlikely to be either sufficiently relaxed to enter into thorough exploration of the issues under discussion, or trusting enough to share their thoughts with the interviewer" (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 54). In this study, the *Chiya-Gaff* (approx. 15 minutes) proved invaluable in terms of making the participants feel comfortable, giving assurance of anonymity, obtaining their verbal permission to use a digital recorder, and ensuring their cooperation

Immediately after the interview, I offered *Khaja* (snacks or light refreshments) to all participants' interviewed in their offices, or at restaurants/hotels. It is a Nepalese tradition and an established cultural practice to offer something to individuals who make a voluntarily contribution to someone else's work. Therefore, the *Khaja* was a treat for the participants for the time and contribution they made to my research. However, when interviews were conducted at participants' homes, I was offered something to drink before and *Khaja* after the interviews instead, and it was a warm reception and hospitality shown towards me as a guest. *Khaja-Samaya*, at the end of interview, provided opportunities for debriefing.

It is also important to note that throughout the research process, when talking to research participants, and while interviewing them, I followed the rule of polite conversation and was polite and respectful (Hobson and Townsend, 2010). Most of the participants' were older than me, had 10-20 year of work experience, in highly respected positions, and represented various government ministries and organisations such as Home Ministry, Ministry of Education, Election Commission, Inland Revenue Department and Public Service Commission. As my research progressed I became increasingly aware of social attributes such as younger and older, experienced and inexperienced, researcher and being researched. Such attributes may imply a high level of inequality in terms of power, education, status and influence and therefore, I remained conscious of the impact of such attributes on the field relationship and on the outcome of the study. I always attached 'Sir', 'Miss' or Madam' suffix to the first or last name of participants to show respect and politeness. It is a common practice in Nepalese society to address teachers as 'Sir', 'Miss' or Madam', which may appear to be formal, or unusual, to people from the west.

Finally, case studies often create ethical dilemmas, particularly, related to the protection of the anonymity of the research participants, and the research site(s). The assurance of institutional

anonymity can be particularly problematic when researching a unique case. Therefore, the names of the university, college, and participants have been anonymised and pseudonyms have been used in this study to protect participants' and institutions' identity.

## **4.9 Conclusions**

In this chapter I described the methodological principles underpinning this research, the limitations of and rationale for case study approach, practical and ethical issues, and data collection methods and data analysis procedures. In the next chapter, based on students' and tutors' views, I explore issues and concerns related to the SLMs provided to students by CDET.

## CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITY OF CURRICULUM MATERIALS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the quality of the curriculum materials or Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) written for the distance students at CDET. The purpose of the analysis is to determine how appropriate the course and the SLMs were, not just for imparting contents but, more importantly, for supporting students learning at a distance. As print media was the primary method of course delivery, I considered that evaluation of the quality of SLMs was essential in order to determine how well these materials served the purpose for which they were designed (Kirkwood and Joyner, 2003).

Therefore, in this chapter, drawing on questionnaire responses, documentary and interview data, I explore the views and experiences of students and tutors regarding the SLMs, and address my first sub-research question (SRQ):

*SRQ 1. What do students and tutors say about the nature of the course and quality of Self-Learning Materials (SLMs)?*

I particularly focus on the nature of the course; organisation and presentation of contents in the SLMs, the nature of activities and tasks; and alignment between learning objectives, course contents and activities in the materials, and the assignment and examination tasks. These are the most common areas in which concerns and issues were raised by the students via questionnaire responses, in interviews and informal talks during the contact session tutorials. All study materials for core subjects were written in Nepali and study materials for some subjects were not available at all, with students having to rely on tutors' hand-outs and lecture notes. I draw examples from the study materials of two subjects, Foundations of Education (a core subject) and ELT Methods (a specialisation subject) as they were illustrative of the rest of

the study materials in that they represent broad patterns in terms of design and structure, content organisation and presentation, activities and assessment of student learning.

## 5.2 Assessing the nature of the course and quality of study materials

In Chapter Three, I explored literature on DE as well as ideas for developing and writing DL course materials were considered. Based on the literature, I also developed guidelines to assess the quality of SLMs provided by CDET to its students (see Appendix, I). Some of the issues and concerns underpinning the course and study materials are discussed below.

### 5.2.1 Nature of the course

Question 8 in the questionnaire investigated the nature of the course (see Appendix II). Table 6 reveals that a majority of students highly rated the clarity of objectives, explicit syllabus and theory-practice balance in the course, but they were negative about other aspects.

Table 6 : Nature of the course

Degree of agreement on course design	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	Rating average	Response count
The objectives of the course are clearly written in the course introduction.	3.4% (2)	22.4% (13)	6.9% (4)	<b>58.6%</b> <b>(34)</b>	8.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	3.47	58
The course contains a clear theoretical rationale behind the way it is designed, delivered and presented to you	13.8% (8)	<b>37.9%</b> <b>(22)</b>	24.1% (14)	15.5% (9)	6.9% (4)	1.7% (1)	2.63	58
The course contains a clearly defined syllabus.	1.7% (1)	13.8% (8)	10.3% (6)	<b>58.6%</b> <b>(34)</b>	13.8% (8)	1.7% (1)	3.70	58
The course covers all aspects of B.Ed. syllabus.	3.4% (2)	<b>77.6%</b> <b>(45)</b>	1.7% (1)	12.1% (7)	1.7% (1)	3.4% (2)	2.29	58
The course contains a clearly written study guides	19.3% (11)	<b>57.9%</b> <b>(33)</b>	7.0% (4)	14.0% (8)	1.8% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.21	57



The course contents are closely linked to expected learning outcomes	5.2% (3)	<b>34.5%</b> (20)	29.3% (17)	24.1% (14)	5.2% (3)	1.7% (1)	2.89	58
My prior knowledge and experience is considered in the course design.	3.4% (2)	<b>37.9%</b> (22)	20.7% (12)	29.3% (17)	3.4% (2)	5.2% (3)	2.91	58
The course encourages me to extend my knowledge and skills beyond the B.Ed. syllabus.	3.5% (2)	<b>57.9%</b> (33)	10.5% (6)	19.3% (11)	8.8% (5)	0.0% (0)	2.72	57
The course has a balance between theoretical and practical aspects.	5.3% (3)	29.8% (17)	8.8% (5)	<b>38.6%</b> (22)	8.8% (5)	8.8% (5)	3.17	57
Skipped questions								1
<b>Note:</b> 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neutral 4=agree, 5=strongly agree, N/A=not applicable. <b>Majority consensus is shown in bold.</b>								

### 5.2.2 Organisation and presentation of course contents

While assessing the organisation and presentation of contents in the SLMs, I was interested in finding out the extent to which they were effectively organised, written in interactive, easy to comprehend and friendly language, and adequate in covering the syllabus for each subject. Before my fieldwork, I had collected and examined the study materials in detail.

As illustrated in Table 7 below, students responding to Q.10 in the questionnaire indicated that their learning needs were not considered during the design of study materials. Most students agreed that every unit/chapter in the study materials contained clearly written objectives, and course contents and objectives were closely aligned, but they also responded that the design of study materials and presentation of contents were poor. Their views tend to suggest that materials design was not informed by the theories and practices of DL.

**Table 7: Students' views on study materials design**

Agreement on study materials design	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
Every unit/chapter in the self- study materials (SLMs) contains objectives.	10.2% (6)	28.8% (17)	16.9% (10)	<b>44.1%</b> <b>(26)</b>	0.0% (0)	3.05	59
Contents are closely related to unit/chapter objectives.	2.0% (1)	18.0% (9)	10.0% (5)	<b>66.0%</b> <b>(33)</b>	4.0% (2)	2.48	50
The presentation and organisation of course contents in the SLMs are clear and easy to follow.	20.3% (12)	<b>54.2%</b> <b>(32)</b>	10.2% (6)	13.6% (8)	1.7% (1)	3.78	59
Friendly language is used in SMLs (e.g., use of 'YOU' to address students)	19.0% (11)	<b>65.5%</b> <b>(38)</b>	3.4% (2)	10.3% (6)	1.7% (1)	3.90	58
Contents are up-to-date.	28.8% (17)	<b>42.4%</b> <b>(25)</b>	5.1% (3)	20.3% (12)	3.4% (2)	3.73	59
A list of key concepts and glossaries are provided.	3.4% (2)	<b>78.0%</b> <b>(46)</b>	10.2% (6)	6.8% (4)	1.7% (1)	3.75	59
References, bibliographies, and suggested further readings are provided.	5.1% (3)	<b>76.3%</b> <b>(45)</b>	8.5% (5)	6.8% (4)	3.4% (2)	3.73	59
Explanations of information/ideas are clear and easy to understand.	3.4% (2)	<b>79.7%</b> <b>(47)</b>	8.5% (5)	8.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	3.78	59
The study materials contain an artistic cover design, durable binding or packaging.	5.1% (3)	<b>52.5%</b> <b>(31)</b>	20.3% (12)	18.6% (11)	3.4% (2)	3.37	59
Text style and layout is visually appealing.	6.9% (4)	<b>55.2%</b> <b>(32)</b>	15.5% (9)	20.7% (12)	1.7% (1)	3.45	58
Ample use of illustrations, charts, diagrams, and pictures.	10.2% (6)	<b>72.9%</b> <b>(43)</b>	13.6% (8)	3.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	3.90	59

As with students' responses to Q. 8 and Q. 10 in the questionnaire, some of the students in the interviews also reported that the SLMs were insufficient, lacked systematic and adequate coverage, were difficult to understand, and were in dire need of review and updating. For example, a student, who was undertaking the course, stated:



*I know that the study materials are not sufficient for us, and learning activities are not adequate. I do not think that by simply following Self-Learning Materials students can achieve the objectives outlined in the units. They just provide simple guidelines...Therefore, I feel that distance learning materials should be self-sufficient so that contact sessions time can be used to discuss, and find solutions to, issues and problems faced by students.*

[Srijana: current student]

Srijana was also pointing out the fact that because of the lack of adequate content coverage in the SLMS, students had to rely on lectures, during the face-to-face tutorials, which restricted the opportunities to communicate individual problems, and to receive academic or other support from tutors.

Another student, who had already completed the course, stated that SLMs were poorly written, inadequate and they provided very little opportunity for students to advance beyond minimum syllabus requirements to extend their learning.

*I think SMLs are sufficient just to pass the exam but they do not have adequate coverage and do not provide any guidance to students who want to accumulate further knowledge. As they provide simple guidelines. ...SMLs do not provide clear and detailed explanations. Explanations are not always easy to follow and not always comprehensive... For the specialisation subject I had to rely on tutorials and hand-outs. There were not complete SLMs for School Management and Supervision. I also used to receive materials from my friends in the Kathmandu centre.*

[Dinesh: ex-student]

It was not only Dinesh who reported that the SLMs lacked adequate content coverage in the SLMs, Shyam and Mohan also stated that the SLMs were insufficient, and therefore they needed to rely on materials published for students at another university.

*Study materials provided to us also lack the depth and breadth of the course. Some of the materials are written in incomprehensible language...They lack coverage. Some of the chapters in the materials are presented in note form, and no clear and detailed explanations are provided... if we want to go into details then we have to consult TU textbooks.*

[Shyam: current student]

*I found that ideas and concepts in the SLMs were not explained clearly...I felt that a summary based on chapter objectives would be helpful... For the Linguistics subject, I found the book by Yadava<sup>23</sup> very useful as the language was simple and easy to understand, ideas were explained clearly. It was way better than our SLM for the subject.*

[Mohan: ex-student]

Some of the students further pointed out that SLMs for some subjects were non-existent. For example:

*Students want materials that adequately cover the course and syllabus, and as they are busy they do not want to search for supplementary materials elsewhere, and yet learning materials are not sufficient in themselves, or not available at all.*

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23 The specialisation subject 'Foundations of Linguistics' did not have SLMs but a text book written for Tribhuvan University B.Ed. students was prescribed at CDET.

*For ELT methods, we were provided with loosely bound material and the material was poorly written, lacked comprehensive coverage and was not easily readable. For Foundations of Linguistics, we were given some hand-outs during the contact orientation and contact sessions, and we were told to read a book by Yadava written for TU B.Ed. course. However, the core subjects' SLMs were comparatively better in terms of content coverage than the materials of specialisation subjects.*

(Binita: ex-student)

While talking to tutors and founder members of CDET, I found that some faculty members, who designed curriculum as well as wrote textbooks for the Tribhuvan University B.Ed. programme, were also involved in designing and tutoring the B.Ed. course at CDET. As a result, the course exhibited some similarities with TU B.Ed. syllabus. One tutor expressed that:

*Most of the course content has also been adopted from TU B.Ed. Perhaps it is because the same experts, who were involved in designing TU B.Ed., were also involved in this programme. Therefore, in terms of the content of the course, there is no significant difference between the face-to-face B.Ed. at TU and distance B.Ed. [at CDET].*

[Ramesh: tutor]

Like students' responses in the questionnaire (see Table 7), some students in the interviews pointed out that study materials did not fully elaborate the meaning of technical jargon, lacked study guidance or tutor narrative and commentaries representing 'tutorial-in-print' (Rowntree, 1992) or 'reflective action guide' (Lockwood, 1992, 1998) and 'guided didactic conversation' (Holmberg, 1983, 1995). Therefore, they struggled to make sense of incomprehensible technical jargon used in the SLMs. These students also highlighted a need for the use of 'access

devices' such as clear introductions, summaries, and review exercises. For example:

*Some concepts and technical terms have not been fully explained. They are not self-contained therefore students need also to consult reference materials, but not all SLMs provide a list of further reading... ideas or concepts were only provided using bullet points and no further explanation or discussion provided... As the SLMs were not adequate, no further readings or references were provided, and there is no library or learning resources at the centre, I was in confusion about how to proceed further. Materials should contain introductions, clear explanations, summaries, and plenty of self-check exercises.*

[Sujan: current student]

*I often encountered difficulties understanding what had been explained. I have completed MPA [Masters of Public Administration] but had never heard of educational psychology. It was very hard for me to follow the study materials... Sometimes I had a problem understanding the technical terms and they were not explained clearly.*

[Rabindra: a student awaiting viva]

*As I come from an English Literature background, I found it difficult to understand technical jargon used in the materials...*

[Mohan]

As can be seen in Table 7, students' responses also indicted that course contents were outdated, difficult to follow and ideas and concepts not sufficiently explained. It may be argued that summary statements, a glossary of technical terms, and a list of further reading would have helped students understand, or find further information on, the difficult concepts and technical jargon.

One respondent expressed similar concerns and highlighted that it was often difficult for him to receive immediate guidance when facing difficulties in understanding the materials.

*Learning materials lack coverage and clarity in their writing. Difficult concepts and ideas are not fully explained. Tutors are not available to provide advice and suggestions when problems are encountered while going through the materials.*

[Student survey: OQR]

I observed that because of tutors' part-time status and busy schedules, it was not always possible for students to receive immediate academic and personal support. When distance students find it difficult to cope with the learning, and do not receive adequate support, they are likely to feel demotivated, isolated and neglected. I discuss this issue in the next chapter.

Similar to the views of majority of students (cf. Table 7), Srijana, who works at the MoE in the educational reform sector, was concerned with the fact that the B.Ed. curriculum still included out-dated curriculum contents, although according to the new educational plan and policy (e.g., School Sector Reform Plan), the curriculum contents should have been immediately changed to make the prospective teachers aware of the new school education structure, and the aims and objectives of basic school education (Grades 1-8) and secondary school education (Grades 8-12).

*I think, the university and the college should learn from the best international practice of distance education and improve the study materials in the coming days... The course syllabus itself is out-dated. The syllabus and study materials were developed and designed a few years ago but now the Ministry of Education has introduced a School Sector Reform Plan, and students studying this course are supposed to be up-to-date with the current educational plans and policies. Therefore, timely revision of the curriculum is necessary.*

[Srijana]

Nevertheless, three tutors stated that low quality materials production was caused due to the lack of adequate finances, shortage of expertise, and lack of support from BirMet. For example:

*I understand that study materials lacked coverage, are out-dated and need quality enhancement. We did not have any distance education experts or media experts to provide suggestions to us and neither did we have experiences of developing distance learning materials. Therefore, the study materials may not reflect the characteristics of self-study materials.*

[Ramesh]

*We have revised the study materials a few times but, because of the cost, regular revision has not been possible. We have taken advice from subject experts while revising the study materials but we do not have media and technical experts. We have also taken some ideas from the materials available in the Nepalese market, designed by distance education institutions. We have also taken feedback, about the materials and course, from the students.... We were aware of some of the principles of distance education but we are restricted by financial and technical constraints. I also think that we are still influenced by the traditional system of pedagogical practices.*

[Sudip]

To my questions on why the college has not been able to produce self-sufficient, interactive, more comprehensible and learner-friendly materials, Sudip further stated that:

*I do not believe that it is possible to produce self-contained study materials for graduate level students covering everything. SLMs only provide basic guidance for students. Having said that I am not saying that our study materials are free of errors, or written in a perfect manner. We had no previous experience of producing materials for distance*

*learners. I know some of the materials do not mention what to read, or how to proceed further. There are many things to improve.*

[Sudip]

It may be argued that adult learners do not require explanation of every small point, but distance learners still benefit from teaching narratives, and advice on how to proceed further or how to find further information. In order to address the various issues raised by students, the SLMs need to be reviewed.

Another tutor (also a one of the founder members, subject expert) stated that reviewing the curriculum or updating materials requires high financial costs.

*The nature of our curriculum should also be changed. This requires curriculum innovation and curriculum change, a review of B.Ed. programmes and their contents, and training/retraining of teachers and trainers, which require huge sums of money.*

[Netra]

Sudip added that yet another problem, underlying the curriculum and materials change, is the lack of support and coordination from the BirMet. According to him, although the CDET authorities requested support to review the curriculum and curriculum materials, the university was not responsive:

*We have requested that the university review and update the study materials, but it turns deaf ears. Mainly, it is the responsibility of the university to review its curriculum, so the university has not been responsible at all.*

However, one student considered SLMs for ‘core’ subjects better in terms of physical quality, and in terms of articulating intended learning outcomes:

*SLMs of three core subjects were of better quality in the sense that their design and binding were durable. They contained chapter objectives, and also 'Practice Exercises' at the end of every 3-4 chapters which students had to do as part of their assignments.*

[Mohan]

I also noticed that most of Core subject SLMs, excluding Current Practices and Issues in Nepalese Education System (CPINES) which only had some collection of tutor hand-outs and photocopies, were better in terms of content coverage, and they exhibited uniformity in terms of design and presentation of ideas, and these SLMs reflected some characteristics of tutorial-in-print such as unit objectives and assignment questions after every 3-4 units.

Sudip described that during the initial years, SLMs were not available for any of the subjects, and tutors used to provide hand-outs to students during the tutorial sessions. Later, they gathered the hand-outs of core subjects, revised and reviewed them, and developed them into the current form. Therefore, the core subject study materials were comparatively better because they had undergone some kind of review process. The other reason is that core subjects are compulsory for all students irrespective of their specialisation subject, and as a result, based on higher sales, the college could afford to produce better quality SLMs for core subjects.

However, Current Practices and Issues of Nepalese Education System (CPINES) did not have comprehensive or good quality study materials. Similarly, although the subject School Management and Supervision (SMS) had attracted the highest number of students in the past few years, students still had to rely on hand-outs and collections of photocopies. During informal talks, CDET authorities explained to me that because of the need to keep down college operation costs, along with the lack of adequate resources, and shortage of expertise, they had been unable to produce good quality SLMs for some of the new subjects such as CPINES and SMS. It is important to note here that CPINES and SMS were uniquely introduced by CDET



whereas Foundations of Education, Educational Psychology, ELT Methods, Foundations of Linguistics share most of its contents with TU B.Ed. programmes, and some of the tutors were involved in teaching at the TU based colleges as well as CDET. The CDET authorities stressed that the next step is to develop better quality self-contained study materials for the remaining subjects including CPINES.

When I attended the contact session tutorials, students reported errors in some of the materials, and also pointed out concepts, terms and explanation they found difficult to understand. Students from Pokhara centre had given me a list of errors and difficult concepts, or inadequately explained ideas found in CPINES, and they wanted me to give that list to the authorities in the Kathmandu centre. Similarly, SLMs designed for specialised subjects, such as ELT Methods, did not adequately explain subject matter, or explanations provided were incomprehensive. For instance, course contents in ELT Methods were poorly organised, superficially presented and unevenly written, and ideas, concepts and terms were not fully elaborated on, or not sufficiently explained (see Appendix VII). Additionally, course contents, from units VI to X, in ELT methods were presented mostly using bullet points.

Following Rowntree (1994a) and Endean (2003), effective DL materials need to be *purposeful, well-structured, self-paced, interactive, and engaging*. Rowntree (1994a) suggests that while designing self-study or self-instructional materials DL materials designers should keep learners' needs in mind throughout the materials development process and, therefore, make use of 'access devices' to ensure that materials are learner-friendly, understandable and accessible to all learners. Access devices are tools in the text or on the screen that help learners find their way around the study materials (COL, 2005). Rowntree recommends that access devices should be considered throughout the materials writing process: *before* (e.g., choosing an explanatory title, choosing contents lists, writing course objectives, writing pre-test questions),

during (e.g., writing an introduction, appropriately organising and presenting contents using verbal signposting or illustrative devices, writing appropriate activities, writing review exercises and assessment tasks based on unit/chapter objectives, writing summaries), and at the end (e.g., providing glossaries, references, index).

Rowntree (1998) suggests that while assessing the quality of DL materials, evaluators should also consider how appropriate, well-structured, up-to-date and balanced the content of the course is. Furthermore, scholars suggest that well-written and effective SLMs should encompass easy to follow ‘teaching narratives’ such as a course overview, course objectives, and unit objectives; study advice and guidance; up-to-date, well-organised, clearly presented comprehensible and contextually relevant contents; chapter summaries, a list of key concepts; self-assessment and review questions; concise information on assessment and assignment tasks; a list of recommended readings glossaries, and an index. Unfortunately, study guidance, chapter summaries, and reflection activities or self-review exercises were rarely evident in these materials. As can be seen from Unit One of *ELT Methods* (see Appendix VII) the value of ‘access devices’, and illustrative devices have been ignored while designing DL materials at CDET. It is important to include ‘teaching narrative’ (Littlejohn, 2004, p. 114) threaded through the learning materials so that learners know how to proceed, and what to accomplish at appropriate times. Therefore, in order to address the diverse needs of the learners studying through distance mode, to make the material more reader-friendly, and to hold the motivation of students, it is important to precisely communicate learning outcomes and the purpose of activities and tasks, and to write the materials using accessible language, and using access and illustrative devices.

Although some attempts have been made to include unit objectives, and some end-of-unit questions, the organisation and presentation of contents in curriculum materials at CDET

mirrors the characteristics of traditional textbooks designed for face-to-face teaching. According to Ellington and Race (1993), objectives should be user-friendly providing learners with clear ideas about the expected learning outcome of the units, and the objectives should be made directly relevant to distance learners' needs and appropriate to the assessment criteria involved. I found that learning objectives were clearly articulated in these materials but they were not always closely linked to unit contents, review exercises or Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs).

Additionally, to facilitate learners understanding, new concepts and terms need be defined, and clearly explained when they are first used. Some technical terms were explained in SLMs when they were first used, whereas others had no explanation. For example, terms used in the ELT Methods SLM such as 'acquisition', 'integrative', 'instrumental motivation', and 'phatic communication' were adequately defined, whereas the SLM contained no explanations of the terms such as 'grammatical morphemes', 'generative grammar', 'contrastive analysis', 'minimal pairs', and 'pattern practice'. As noted above, some of the students consulted TU textbooks to gather information on difficult concepts and technical jargon as they were not clearly or adequately explained in the SLMs of certain subjects. Additionally, some of the SLMs did not provide lists of further readings. It may be helpful therefore to provide 'briefings' for the use of external resources in the materials in order to help students find further information on such technical jargon or difficult concepts.

Most of the materials are written in a textbook style. Although these materials are called 'Self-Learning Materials', they lack the characteristics of self-instructional materials, or 'tutorials-in print' (Rowntree, 1994a). SLMs should be self-explanatory, self-contained, self-directed, self-motivating, self-evaluating, and should promote active learning (Murthy and Ramanujam, 2005). Lockwood (1998) also suggests that DL materials designed for learners should always

provide objectives, place emphasis on self-assessment, provide summaries, address the learners using a personal tone, provide study skills advice and should promote active learning. Prior to my field-work, and from initial analysis of the course materials, I had concluded that materials designers at CDET were either unaware of the current principles and practices of designing DL materials, or they simply could not afford the design and production cost, particularly due to the small number of students studying at CDET. It was evident from the interviews with some of the tutors and materials writers that due to the lack of knowledge, experience and expertise in DL in Nepal, and because of the lack of adequate financial resources, the curriculum materials designers were unable to make the materials more interactive, and learner-friendly. As already discussed, Peters (1997, 2007) in his theory of ‘the most industrialised form of teaching and learning’ suggests that mass-consumption of DL materials is essential to improve their quality. As CDET only enrolled about 300 students annually, and the college did not receive any public funding, the CDET authorities reported that, depending on student fees alone, it was very hard for them to meet the administrative costs, delivery costs, and the cost of producing SLMs of better quality. Having discussed the issues relating to the nature of the course materials, and organisation and presentation of course contents in the SLMs, next I discuss the nature of the activities in the curriculum materials.

### **5.2.3 Assessment of the nature of activities and tasks**

A distinctive feature of or the most important device employed in DL materials is the activities which are designed to encourage the learners to respond to the text and to promote active learning (Lockwood, 1992, 1998). Rowntree (1994a) suggests that activities in DL materials are crucial, not only because activities are meant to keep learners purposefully engaged with the study materials, but because they can also help learners to go beyond memorisation, to relate their learning to their own situation, to bring in their own experiences and reflect on their

own feelings and thoughts, to monitor their own progress, and to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Question 10 in the questionnaire also asked students about their views on the activities and tasks in the SLMs, and as illustrated in the Table 8 below, a majority of the students responded that activities and tasks in the SLMs were inadequate, summary and self-assessment exercises were not provided, and activities and tasks were not closely linked to chapter/unit objectives.

**Table 8: Students' views on activities and tasks**

Agreement activities and tasks	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
Sufficient activities are given in the study materials.	8.6% (5)	<b>70.7%</b> <b>(41)</b>	13.8% (8)	6.9% (4)	0.0% (0)	3.81	58
Every unit/chapter in the self- study materials contains summaries.	10.2% (6)	<b>67.8%</b> <b>(40)</b>	8.5% (5)	13.6% (8)	0.0% (0)	3.75	59
Review sections, and self-assessment exercises are provided.	5.1% (3)	<b>62.7%</b> <b>(37)</b>	13.6% (8)	18.6% (11)	0.0% (0)	3.54	
Activities and tasks are related to unit/chapter objectives.	3.4% (2)	<b>55.9%</b> <b>(33)</b>	28.8% (17)	11.9% (7)	0.0% (0)	3.51	59

Some of the students in the interviews also stated that the SLMs were demotivating, and lacked varied activities. For example:

*Study materials were not interactive and only activities in the materials were the end-of-unit questions. Some materials even did not have such questions.*

[Binita]

*The SLMs do not include many activities and exercises for self-evaluation apart from a few 'practice-questions' at the end of each unit or at the end of few units... I found some parts of the materials rather boring and it was not easy for me to understand the contents...*

[Bhim]

*I found that study materials were poorly written. They lacked varied learning activities and therefore were boring.*

[Anup]

I also noticed a lack of adequate and varied activities and tasks in the study materials (see Appendix VII). The only feature that distinguished these materials from the traditional textbook was the fact that they provided aims and objectives for each unit/chapter, and a list of end-of-unit questions.

Simply reading long chapters without having to refer to any tasks, or activities, and without receiving 'tutorial-in-print' or teaching narrative, distance learners are likely to lose interest and motivation which in turn may lead them to stop reading the materials altogether. Therefore, purposeful and adequate activities in the SLMs are vital in order to help learners check their understanding and progress, and to actively engage them through the learning process.

In addition, as can be seen in the Table 8 above, students responded that the SLMs were poor in terms of providing summaries, review sections and self-assessment tasks. Summaries, reviews and SAQs in SLMs can serve as very useful devices for reminding learners of the main objectives of the chapter/unit or for providing repeats and reminders about the crucial points, ideas and concepts covered in the units allowing learners to identify these clearly (Ellington and Race, 1993) as well as giving learners confidence that they are progressing well, and

allowing learners the opportunity to bring their own experiences to bear on their studies (Race, 1998).

Two students in interviews also stated that some of the end-of-the-unit/chapter review questions are either not directly related the chapter/units, or concepts related to these questions were not fully explained in the materials, therefore, they needed to consult supplementary materials for further information based on the topics covered in the B.Ed. syllabus.

*From my short experience, I have realised that sometimes answers to the 'practice-questions' were not available in the study material. In every contact session, as assignment tasks, we [students] are normally provided with one long question, five short questions and twenty multiple choice questions. I do not think these questions are sufficient to adequately check my learning and progress, and for successfully preparing for final examination.*

[Bhim]

*It was not always possible to find an answer to all review questions provided, reading these SLMs. Explanations of some concepts were not sufficient. You can imagine what the condition of students will be like if they have to start learning everything from scratch.*

[Rabindra]

Hence, it may be argued that the course coverage was either incomprehensive or that the unit objectives, unit contents and review questions were not always closely linked. I elaborate on this issue later in the chapter.

As discussed in Chapter Three, many scholars (e.g., Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Hillman et al., 1994) have acknowledged the importance of various of types of interaction (e.g., learner-content, learner-learner, learner-tutor, learner-interface) in order to make DL effective and

meaningful. Anderson (2003) notes that specially designed SLMs are constructed with the explicit intent of providing high levels of student-content interaction. He argues that deep and meaningful learning is supported when one of the three forms of interaction (student-teacher; student-student; student-content) is at a high level in DL courses. Where learner-tutor contact (both by face-to-face or by technological means) is limited, purposeful activities, reflective questions and assessment tasks in SLMs can play a crucial role to promote learner-content interaction, to actively engage learners, and to make DL more effective. Time spent interacting with subject matter in the SLMs or carrying out meaningful activities and tasks is much more valuable than time spent simply reading them (Race, 1998).

I noticed that every unit of all SLMs started with clearly defined objectives and intended learning outcomes, and finishes with a list of practice questions with no other in-text activities and tasks for the learners to carry out while reading the materials (see Appendix VII). Such study materials are not likely to promote active learning, nor do they seem to encourage learners to engage in critical thinking, or reflect on their actions or learning. Instead they promote content-oriented learning strategies such as rote learning, memorisation, and the reproduction, or recall of facts given in the materials. In a circumstance where learners have to read long chapters that lack adequate explanation, where they are required to carry out no activities and tasks or where the purpose of the activities and tasks is unclear, learners are likely to be bored, passive, and demotivated while studying DL materials. Furthermore, where activities are limited and assessment tasks do not require students to involve in in-depth understanding of content but rather require them to absorb the materials and memorise facts, students are likely to take a surface approach to learning. Marland (1997, p. 99) argues that “those students who adopt a surface approach are extrinsically motivated, principally by desire to satisfy assessment requirements set by others and to complete compulsory tasks in the subject”. They are “satisfiers”, prepared only to do enough to satisfy minimal requirements for passing the



assessment tasks or examination (ibid.). According to Marland such types of learners see learning as memorisation and reproduction of content. As illustrated earlier, Bhim, in the interview, also indicated that he was more exam-oriented and concerned with finding answers to 'practice questions' given in the SLMS so that he can approach the final examination with ease. Marland (1997) further states that unclear objectives, or confusing tasks, and poorly written and badly organised learning materials, exclude the possibility of learners reaching a deep level of understanding.

For that reason, activities, tasks and exercises are important features of self-instructional materials which are meant to keep learners purposefully engaged with the SLMs (Rowntree, 1994; Lockwood, 1998). However, the nature and number of activities and tasks in such study materials may depend on the types of SLMs such as 'tutorial-in-print' and a 'reflective action guide'. For example, tutorial-in-print entails well-defined learning objectives, the course materials intend to teach a well-defined body of knowledge, and such study materials includes in-text questions (ITQs), self-assessment questions (SAQs) and exercises or assignments often for assessment by a tutor (Rowntree, 1994a, 1994b) whereas in the 'reflective action guide' approach to material writing, learning outcomes tend to be broader, encouraging more personalised learning experiences, and involves reflective-action-based activities requiring learners to involve in critical and reflective thinking (Lockwood, 1998; COL, 2005). SLMs for DL in higher education may take a blended approach to material writing. For example, such materials can include clearly articulated learning objectives as in tutorial-in-print accompanied by activities and tasks that require learners to involve in thinking critically and reflectively upon their actions, as in a 'reflective action guide'. Rowntree (1994b, p. 101) suggests that there can be three types of learner activity in self-instructional materials: a) questions and exercises embedded in the materials, b) self-test questions at the end of a section, c) assignments or exercises to be submitted to the tutors. Although, it is difficult to decide the

number of activities and tasks in SLMs, COL (2005) suggests that every learning outcome should have at least one activity, or should be covered by at least one activity, and learning outcomes having more than ten or so activities are perhaps too large and should be split into smaller outcomes.

It may be important, therefore, to consider the fact that activities in SLMs should be related to the learning outcomes of each unit, and such learning activities should be embedded in the materials and well spread throughout the unit rather than simply providing learners with a list of ITQs and SAQs at the end of each unit, or after the end of every 2-3 units. Therefore, at this juncture, I would like to consider the objectives of Unit Three in *ELT Methods* and of the end-of-unit questions given.

**Table 9: Example of unit objectives and practice exercise**

<b>Objectives:</b> By the end of the unit you should be able to:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>State the factors that affect a child's second/foreign language learning</i></li> <li>- <i>Explain and illustrate the role of motivation in language learning</i></li> <li>- <i>Mention the qualities/strategies of a good language learner</i></li> </ul>
<b>Exercise:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i>Why do you think some people are good at learning other languages? Give illustrations referring to the Nepalese context.</i></li> <li>b. <i>Do you value self-learning (student) the L2 rather than tutored learning? Give reasons.</i></li> </ul>

[Taken, *as is*, from the SLM of *ELT Methods*, Unit Three]

There are various problems with such types of exercise. For example, the tasks or questions are not closely related to the learning outcomes of the units; the purpose of the tasks are not clear; they may not encourage students to reflect on their progress, and check their

understanding; and no study advice or guidance on how to proceed is provided. As illustrated in the Table 10, the activity could have been better devised in the following way as a self-assessment and reflection activity.

Table 10: Sample Activity

**Review and Reflection**

**Purpose:** The main purpose of the task is to check your understanding of some basic terms and concepts presented in Unit Three, and reflect on your learning, and progress. In the unit we focused on:

- The individual and general factors affecting language learning
- Role of motivation in language learning
- Six language learning strategies proposed by Griffiths (2008)

**Tasks: Check your progress**

1. Make a list of personal and general factors that affect language learning.
2. Critically analyse how you think personal factors affect language learning (max. 1000 words).
3. Define motivation. Motivation plays a significant role in language learning. To what extent does you own experience of learning a second or foreign language validate this argument. (max. 1000 words).
4. Identify and describe six language learning strategies. Explain to what extent these strategies are applicable to your English learning. (max. 1000 words).

**Comment**

If you can complete these tasks, then well done! You are making excellent progress. On the other hand, if you cannot, then you will need to do more reading. Please refer to Unit Three of the self-study materials provided to you.

**Further Reading**

If you wish to explore more, please read:

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Lightbown, P.M. and Spada, N. (2001) 'Factors affecting second language learning', in C. Candlin and N. Mercer (Eds.), *English Language Teaching in its Social Context: A Reader*, New York, Routledge.

Griffiths, C (Ed.) (2008) *Strategies and good language learners*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

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One could argue, however, that students may not take the self-assessment task seriously or that they do not seriously reflect on their own learning. Nevertheless, when students are required to refer to these tasks in order to complete their tutor marked assignments, or answer questions in their end-of-course written examination, the worth of these tasks in fostering active learning will be demonstrated. In other words, to foster active learning, assignment or assessment tasks should be closely aligned with learning objectives, the teaching and learning, and the assessment system.

The notion of *constructive alignment* (Biggs, 1996, 2003) is concerned with whether or not learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the learning outcomes of the course. In other words, constructive alignment proposed by Biggs refers to a match between the learning objectives, the teaching and learning activities and the assessment tasks. Assessment tasks should be closely aligned with learning objectives, consistent with activities and tasks, and interwoven with study materials. Rust (2002, p. 11) summarises that constructive alignment requires the course designer, and assessors, to follow three main stages in the process of course design: identify learning outcomes; provide appropriate learning opportunities; design appropriate assignment tasks that reflect desired learning outcomes.

Next, I focus on the nature of assessment and constructive alignment between learning objectives, activities and exercises in the study materials and assignment or examination tasks



5.2.4 Nature of assessment and constructive alignment

Assessment is central to any teaching and learning process. In this section, I consider whether or not there was an alignment between objectives of the units/chapters of SLMs, contents and activities within the SLMs and the end-of-course written examination tasks, devised by CDET.

The evaluation criteria, for assessing this aspect of the materials, included whether or not the course objectives were explicitly stated in relation to course contents and learning outcomes, and whether or not there was a close alignment between the intended learning outcomes, activities and tasks in the materials, and assessment tasks or final examination questions. As can be seen in the Table 11 below, the study materials designed for the Foundation of Education revealed that intended learning outcomes and end-of-unit questions were closely related. However, apart from the list of end-of-unit questions, there was no provision for other activities and tasks within the materials of core subjects.

Table 11: Comparison of the intended learning outcomes, practice questions and assessment tasks

Foundations of education: Unit Eight: Modern Trends in Education	
Intended learning outcomes	End-of-unit practice questions
<u>Students will be able to:</u>	
- describe the concept of <i>education as an investment</i>	- Explain the concept of <i>education as an investment</i> .
- explain the role of education in political socialisation	- Describe the characteristic of non-formal education.
- describe the characteristic of non-formal education	- Explain the importance of continuing education.
- define the notion of continuing education	
End-of-course written examination question (2004)	
Q. [10] Discuss the need and approaches of open learning in the context of Nepal.	

As seen in the table above, Unit Eight is about ‘Modern Trends in Education’, and it is also important to note that section 8.4.3 of the unit deals with *Open Education- Its aims and characteristics*. There seems to be a close link between intended learning outcomes and the end-of-unit ‘practice questions’ in the example above. However, a fundamental concern is the disparity between what is covered in the unit, and what has been assessed by the exam. For example, ‘*approaches to open learning*’ has neither been discussed anywhere in the unit, nor has the unit provided any suggestion for further reading, or guidance on where to find information regarding this, despite the fact that the terms ‘open and distance learning’ is mentioned in the course of study for the subject. As illustrated in the Table 11 above, however, students were required, in their formal written examination in 2004 (see Appendix VIII, Q. 10), to write about ‘approaches of open learning’. It clearly depicts a “teacher-centred” and “content-oriented” approach (Kember, 2007, p. 24) to learning, and assessment. It appeared that assessment procedures at CDET are influenced by the beliefs that teachers are the source of knowledge, and that the role of the teacher is to transmit a body of knowledge through direct teaching, and that the students require to reproduce the knowledge transmitted by teachers during examinations.

The Table 12 below shows that a majority of the students considered the need for varieties of assessment methods, use of both continuous as well as summative forms of student evaluation. Nonetheless, assessment in theoretical subjects relied heavily on the end-of-course written examination. Although a majority of the students agreed that intended learning outcomes, course contents and assignment/examination tasks need to be closely linked, they negatively rated the alignment between these aspects. Furthermore, most of the students were not satisfied with the fact that the course emphasised content-oriented pedagogy requiring them to memorise facts rather than promoting creativity and critical thinking.

**Table 12: Nature of assessment and constructive alignment**

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
I think there should be a balance between self-assessment, tutor marked assignments, contact session presentation, and end-of - course examinations in the course.	0.0% (0)	13.6% (8)	16.9% (10)	<b>54.2%</b> <b>(32)</b>	15.3% (9)	3.71	59
I believe that course objectives, course contents, and assessment tasks/examination questions should be closely related.	0.0% (0)	8.8% (5)	10.5% (6)	<b>68.4%</b> <b>(39)</b>	12.3% (7)	3.84	57
There is little, or no, connection between course objectives, content of learning materials and assignment/assessment tasks	3.4% (2)	13.6% (8)	20.3% (12)	<b>50.8%</b> <b>(30)</b>	11.9% (7)	3.54	59
The assessment provision on the course emphasises as absorption and reproduction of course content	3.4% (2)	11.9% (7)	16.9% (10)	<b>50.8%</b> <b>(30)</b>	<b>16.9%</b> <b>(10)</b>	3.66	59
Skipped questions							0

Note: 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neutral 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Morgan and O'Reilly (1999, p. 480) note that “misalignment between subject objectives and assessment is surprisingly commonplace in DE, particularly where the assignments are updated each year but the materials remain largely unaltered”. For various reasons, the SLMs prepared by CDET have also not been updated for about a decade, but every year students receive different assignment or assessment questions. Since students undertaking the course during my fieldwork did not have experience of an end-of-course written examination, I asked ex-students if they had encountered any questions in the final examination, or assignment tasks that were not directly related to the topics in the course, or not covered by the SLMs. Although three ex-students reported that they could not recall such kind of assessment tasks or examination questions, one ex-student stated that he encountered some examination questions not covered in the course materials.

*I encountered some examination questions not directly related to the syllabus. I cannot remember all, but while solving Multiple Choice Questions, there were many scholars' names I had never come across while studying the SLMs.*

[Rabindra]

However, another ex-student, Binita, who specialised in English Education, represented a slightly different view. While she was aware that some examination questions in past exam papers were not covered by the SLMs, when she appeared in her final examination, the questions were related to the topics covered in the course.

*I know SLMs are not always sufficient and they do not always cover all the topics in the B.Ed. syllabus. There are not enough exercises in these materials for us [students] to practice. I studied books and guides from TU. I had also collected past exam papers from the study centre and tried to find answers to these questions. However, it was not always possible to get ideas and find answers to these questions from the SLMs. When I could not find more information in the SLMs or even from the TU textbooks, I used to ask my tutors during the contact session tutorials. Fortunately, my experience of the final examination is that I did not come across any questions outside the topics covered in the course.*

[Binita]

Additionally, as a part of end-of-course written examination, all theoretical subjects contained multiple choice questions (MCQs) incurring 20% of marks out of the 80% total. During the tutorials sessions, I also noticed that some of the students were anxious about finding answers to the MCQs given in the SLMs. Objectives questions such as true/false, MCQs, 'fill in the blanks', might be quite useful diagnostically and serve as helpful pacing device, but do not



promote deeper level learning (Rowntree, 1998). In an assessment context, where the emphasis is to memorise and reproduce what they have read, or absorbed, assignment-focused learners (Lockwood, 1992) or examination-oriented students may make strategic decisions to by-pass much of the course material, and are likely to adopt a surface approach to their learning (Morgan and O'Reilly, 1999). In such circumstances, it would be very unusual for them to enter an examination room without having consulted past papers to get an idea of what was required of them (Falchikov, 2005). As I discuss in the next chapter, one of the tutors was concerned with the fact that during the contact session tutorials most of the students want to find out answers to the questions given in the materials, or from past exam papers rather than focusing on tutorials.

Furthermore, the communication of assessment tasks, adequately and concisely, to the learner is a very important and sensitive aspect of DL (Morgan and O'Reilly, 1999). Yet, some of the written examination questions found in past examination papers were ambiguous and lacked clarity on what was expected from the students. For example: the question below is taken from the formal examination question paper 2003 in the subject ELT Methods (see Appendix IX).

***Q. 7. What do you understand by SLA?***

This question is likely to create confusion in students as to how to approach it, and about what the examiner is looking for. It could have been written as:

***Q. 7. Describe briefly the concept of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)?*** (Write no more than 250 words). You will be given five marks for clearly demonstrating the understanding of the concept, and two marks for your language structure and presentation style.

The notion of constructive alignment suggests that learning objectives, course assignments, expectations of tutors and students clearly communicated, and assessment tasks need to measure stated objectives (Mainka et al., 2005). When there is no constructive alignment, students are likely to focus on what they think will be assessed rather than learning what is in the teacher education curriculum and what is covered by the study materials. However, I discovered that some the formal examination questions were not closed linked. At this point, I would like to consider the desired learning outcomes, and end-of-unit questions given in Unit I of ELT Methods (see Table 13).

**Table 13: Assessment of constructive alignment**

ELT methods: Unit One: Introduction to language learning theories	
Intended learning outcomes	End-of-unit practice questions
<p><u>Students will be able to:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- distinguish between language learning and acquisition</li> <li>- state and describe the stages involved in language development</li> <li>- identify components of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)</li> <li>- show an understanding of the hypothesis about SLA</li> <li>- show an understanding of different theories</li> </ul>	<p>a. Give five reasons why studying a foreign language is useful? (A language other than English?)</p> <p>b. Give five reasons why learning English is important?</p>
End-of-course written examination question (2003)	
Q. [5] State why learning English is important in Nepalese context?	

As can be seen in the table above, on the one hand, end-of-unit questions, and the assessment task (see Appendix IX, Q. 5) are closely aligned. On the other hand, the assessment task does

not match the intended learning outcomes of the unit. In other words, there is no constructive alignment between assessment tasks, learning activities, and tasks or questions given in the study materials and the desired learning outcomes.

With regard to assessment question five discussed above, for prospective teachers to answer this particular ‘essay’ type of question, they do not need to read, or actively engage with, the study materials. It seems that the question is testing students’ essay writing skills rather than an understanding of the unit objectives, or intended learning outcomes. The task could have been more appropriate, perhaps, if it was included as an activity within the unit, giving some clues or guidance on how to tackle it, as in the sample activity provided below (see Table 14), as a means to relate the task to their own experience and as a tool to foster self-reflection on their learning and the intended outcomes of the course, or unit.

Table 14: Sample activity: Review and reflection

Check you progress
<b>Purpose:</b> The main purpose of the task is to check your understanding of some basic terms and concepts you have worked with so far. The task also encourages you to reflect on your own experience and learning. It also invites you to check your skills in constructing an argument.
<b>Tasks:</b> <div><div>a. Identify any five differences between language acquisition and language learning? (e.g., subconscious act of ‘picking up’ a language vs. conscious act of ‘studying’ a language)</div><div>b. People learn a second, or foreign, language for various reasons. For example, some people learn English because it can:<div><div>- function as an indicator of social status and prestige;</div><div>- act as a key or ‘gatekeeper’ to universities, and better jobs in a global market;</div><div>- help understand current research and scholarship in written English;</div><div>- help teach English in a better way;</div></div></div></div>

- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Why do you think learning English is important in the Nepalese context, or why are you learning English? Write about 300 words.
- d. Identify three theories of second language acquisition (SLA), and write a paragraph (max. 100 words) on each. (*If you think you cannot answer the question, please refer to Unit I of your self-study material, and read the section on 'Theories of SLA'.*)
- e. Do you think the knowledge of such SLA theories is important for English language teachers? (Why/why not?) Please provide at least four reasons to support your argument.

### Further Reading

If you wish to explore more, the theories of SLA, please read Chapter II, '*Early theories in second language acquisition*' of the book:

Vanpatten, B. & Williams, J. (2006) *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction*, London, Routledge.

The nature of assessment influences what students actually learn, and how they approach the assessment. Particularly, when there is over-emphasis on summative forms of assessment, i.e. formalised end-of-year written examination, such as that at CDET, and when there is more emphasis on grades/marks, or certification, rather than on learning, there is a likely danger that students will not go through the study materials, and the aims and objectives of the subject will be undermined. I also noticed that most of the students appeared to be exam-oriented as the majority of them placed emphasis on obtaining a first division grade, which was an essential prerequisite for their job promotion. Rust (2002, p. 147) argues that when the assessment decisions are concerned with "mark or grade, the linkage to the learning outcomes becomes even more untenable".

Another feature about the assessment of students on the B.Ed. course is the provision of an internal examination (weighting 20%). Students are said to be assessed on their participation in inductions and orientations, seminars and workshops, and on the quality of assignments submitted during the contact sessions. However, the internal assessment procedure appears to be based on the tutors' subjective interpretations of students' progress. For example, a specialisation subject such as ELT Methods contains no assignment tasks at all, and therefore, it was unclear what would constitute an internal examination (20%), whereas the 'core' subject such as *Foundations of Education* includes three assignment tasks, within the study materials, which students are required to submit at three different contact sessions but without any explicit information about what is expected from them. As can be seen in the assignment for the second contact session (see Appendix X), it contains a list of 13 questions (3 long, and 10 short answer questions), but no information about its purpose, guidance on its writing (such as how to proceed, about being critical, word length, deadline) or the marking criteria, has been provided.

It seems that in CDET assessment process the grading function is over-emphasised, and the learning function underemphasised (Black and Wiliam, 1998). What is crucial to remember is that students in a face-to-face setting get various opportunities to interact with their teachers, obtain feedback, and discuss their progress, whereas distance learners "are more dependent upon effective, early communication of assessment requirements, together with well-designed and cohesive assessment tasks, useful and timely support, and a transparent marking scheme that explains how judgements are to be made" (Morgan and O'Reilly, 1999, p. 22). However, placing a greater focus on a summative form of assessment, or formalised end-of-year examination seem to remove distance learners from opportunities to review their learning on the course, and to receiving feedback, support and guidance to improve it. Lack of such opportunities is likely to cause frustration and exam-anxiety in students, and they are likely to

feel isolated, and lose interest and motivation in learning. It is essential, therefore, to combine formative assessment with some forms of summative assessment.

So with regard to assessment at CDET, provision could be made to encompass *formative assessment* (e.g., tutor-marked assignments, self- assessment questions, seminar presentations, student portfolios) as well as *summative assessment* (e.g., end-of-course examination). According to Morgan and O'Reilly (1999), assessment that has both a formative and summative component is referred to as *continuous assessment*. Morgan and O'Reilly (1999, p. 16) suggest that continuous assessment is a very sensible approach to assess distance learners because it:

- provides some structure to learning;
- breaks down the assessment load into manageable chunks;
- is encouraging, motivation and confidence-building;
- provides a source of ongoing dialogue between teachers and learners;
- provides insight for learners into their progress

However, the workload for tutors, the costs and human resources required to handle continuous assessments, at a small and not technologically equipped DE institution such as CDET, have to be kept in mind. While thinking about a shift towards a learning-oriented assessment system, the feasibility of such provision and the local/national educational context (e.g., what is valued by teachers, by students, by employers and what is accountable: certification vs. pedagogical knowledge) also need be considered as they may impact on assessment practices. For example, Robinson (1999) revealed that the Chinese education system emphasises content-oriented learning; individual needs are given low priority; teachers are considered as a source of knowledge; high value is given to memorisation; repetition is frequently used as a learning strategy; and the learner is responsible for succeeding based on individual efforts. Nonetheless,

well-designed, varied, and constructively aligned self-evaluation activities and assessment tasks, and learning-oriented assessment practices can provide a valuable learning experience to students, which promotes active learning (Biggs, 2003).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study found that the course objectives were clear, and students were provided with a clearly defined syllabus. Although SLMs were very clear in terms of articulating unit/chapter objectives and intended learning outcomes, SLMs for most of the subjects were criticised for failing to adequately cover the B.Ed. syllabus, for not being easy to comprehend and for the out-dated course contents. The SLMs for core subjects were found to be comparatively better in terms of content coverage, and were consistent in their design, layout, organisation and presentation of content. The study materials designed for specialisation subjects still have some way to go to achieve the desirable characteristics of self-study materials. They were deficient in terms of the content presentations, use of teaching narratives and use of access devices. The SLMs needed to effectively employ 'access devices', in order to guide the learner in using these materials, providing a route map of units, introductions, aims and objectives , summaries, self-assessment exercises, glossary and lists of recommended reading. Activities and assessment tasks were not inadequate and lacked clear guidance and instruction on how to approach them. SLMs should provide ample opportunity for learners, through varied activities and tasks, self-assessment questions, and continuous assessment and feedback, to check their progress and learning. Although I tried to revise or redesign some of the activities and tasks, I do not claim them to be perfect. It appeared that the causes behind the poor SLMs quality were insufficient financial resources as well as a shortage of expertise and lack of experiences and training in DL materials development. This study showed that the SLMs at CDET need to be updated and constructed with the input of tutors, subject specialists, DE scholars, students and technical



specialists. A periodic review of the curriculum and study materials is crucial so that these materials cater for the needs of distance learners.

Finally, SLMs as well as the assessment system at CDET reflected a philosophy of teacher-centred and content-oriented pedagogy which seems to be neither appropriate nor favourable for students studying at a distance. Therefore, if possible, CDET should review its existing assessment provision and introduce continuous assessment strategies. Additionally, assessment tasks need to be closely aligned with course objectives, intended learning outcomes, and activities and tasks in the study materials as well as formal written examination questions. In other words, “a good teaching system aligns teaching method and assessment to the learning activities stated in the objectives so that all aspects of this system are in accord in supporting appropriate student learning” (Biggs, 2003, p. 11).

In the next chapter, I explore students’ perspectives and experiences of various aspects of the programme, such as the relevance of the course to their professional needs; educational infrastructure and learning resources; administration and management; assessment and feedback system; student support system and contact session tutorials.



# CHAPTER SIX: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

## 6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I explored students' views and concerns about the SLMs provided to them by CDET. As discussed in Chapter Three, Kirkpatrick (2006) suggests that it is important to consider trainee teachers' reactions to the DL courses in order to determine the quality of such programmes. Exploring students' experiences, views and understanding of the educational programme may also help identify issues, concerns, strengths and weaknesses of the programme. For this purpose, this chapter addresses my second sub-research question:

*SRQ 2: What are the experiences and views of the students regarding educational infrastructure and learning resources, administration and management of the programme, student support and face-to-face tutorial sessions, and student assessment system?*

As identified during the data analysis process, I discussed students' perspectives in terms of the following broad themes: students' motivation for undertaking the distance B.Ed. course; educational infrastructure and facilities, organisation and management, assessment and feedback mechanisms, student support services; and contact session tutorials and tutor expertise.

## 6.2 Motivation and rationales for choosing the course

Question 3 in the questionnaire asked students to choose one or more reasons from a range of eight major reasons for selecting the B.Ed. course. As can be seen in the Figure 6 below, the majority of students stated that the course would be helpful for job promotion (87.9%),

Banda/Strikes (77.6%) causing difficulty in accessing traditional universities, and the fact that they could study while working (70.7%).

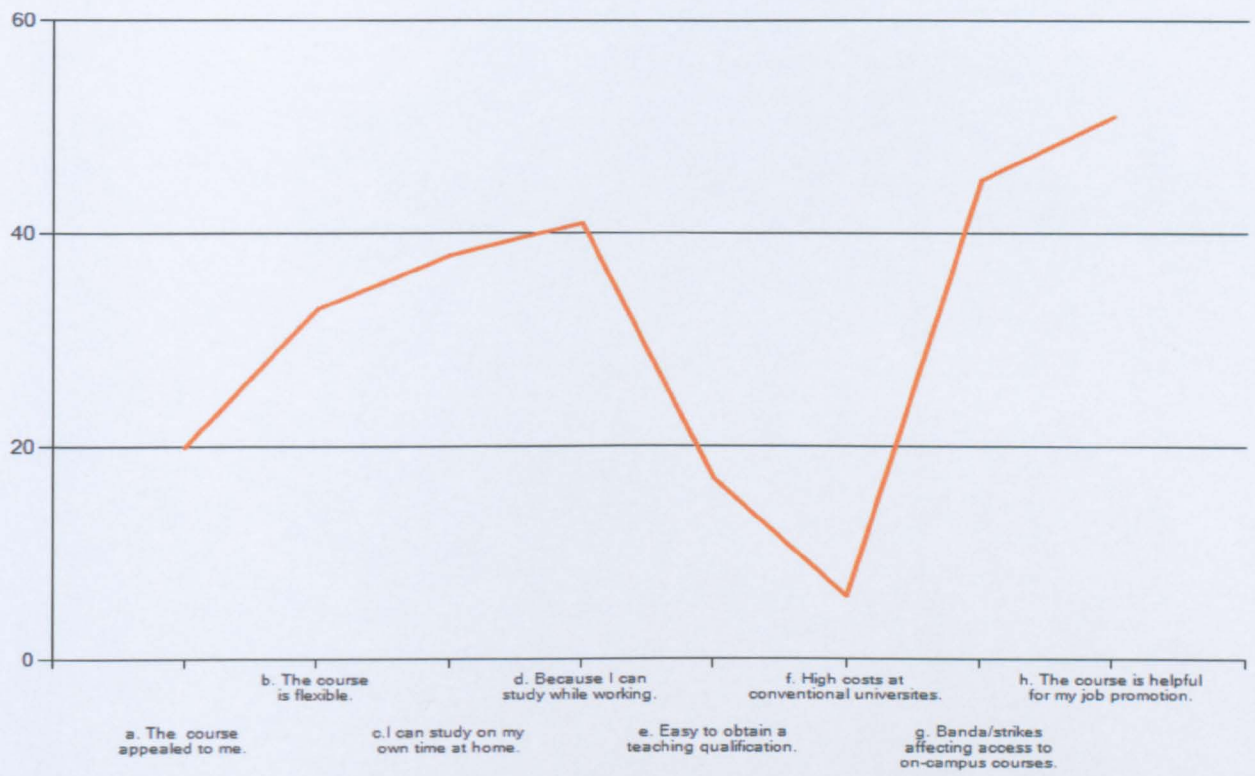


Figure 6: Motivation for taking the distance B.Ed. course

As a B.Ed. qualification in Nepal can be obtained from conventional universities at a cheaper cost, during the interviews, I also asked students about the factors that motivated them to undertake the course. Interviews elicited varied responses. For example:

*The first and perhaps most important reason is to acquire the qualification as a means to help my job promotion. The second reason is that the course is suitable for me in terms of travel commitment and it is flexible in terms of where and when I study... I could utilise my free time particularly in the morning and evening for study....Finally, I also think that the teaching sector is a very attractive profession, and after my retirement, I would like to engage in the teaching field. I am thinking of establishing a*

*community college, and therefore, a very important element would be to acquire knowledge and skills related to teaching and learning.*

[Dinesh]

*I chose this course because of my professional needs, thinking that it will facilitate my job promotion. I work full-time, and have family responsibilities, and the course is convenient for me as I do not have to attend daily classes in college.*

[Devendra]

The above interview excerpts also illustrate that promotion prospects, and flexibility and convenience of the course (in terms of time, and location of study, and not requiring regular on-campus attendance) were the main driving force in choosing the B.Ed. course. Most students expressed the view that the course would enhance their promotion possibilities or make them eligible for career advancement or widening career opportunities provided that they pass the course in first division ( 60% or more of the aggregate marks).

*One reason is that I liked the practical subjects and practicum component of the exam system at CDET...There is also a rumour in the market that most students pass the course with first division. I am also expecting first division.*

[Shyam]

Shyam indicated that he was driven by the hope, motivation and expectation that it was possible for them to acquire the degree with high marks, or good grades. It may be worth noting that, since the course required hard work and contained some practicum subjects, most students on the course seem to have implicit assumptions that they can pass the B.Ed. with high marks from CDET than from other conventional universities. However, anxieties and uncertainties

relating to successfully completing the course, and acquiring the qualification within a year, were evident. As I discuss in later sections, some students feared that if exam results were not published on time, they would miss the opportunities for job promotion or for continuing teacher education courses at a higher level.

Another interviewee expressed the view that the course provided him not only with alternative pathways to teacher education, not previously available to geographically dispersed students, but also with career change options:

*Although the course is more expensive compared to B.Ed. at other universities, I decided to take the course because it provided higher education and training opportunities for people who live in remote areas for gaining new knowledge and skills, and a valid teaching qualification while working. I graduated from TU with MBS [Masters of Business Studies], but this B.Ed. qualification will help me prepare for a career in teaching as well.*

[Anup]

Additionally, some students wanted to gain educational experiences of DL courses and a teaching qualification from the DE institution.

*I did the course to acquire a teaching licence, and also with a view to accumulate knowledge and skills of teaching...I completed B.A. from Tribhuvan University but I wanted to get a new educational experience from the distance education institution.*

[Mohan]

It may be worth mentioning that most of students were not taking course for developing their career in teaching but were bureaucrats or government employees undertaking the course as a means to job promotion. It may be important to note that in the past years one-year B.Ed. qualification was not recognised as an academic degree by Public Service Commission in Nepal and holders of second class academic degrees used to be given less priorities while promoting bureaucrats or civil officials to higher grades in their service. However, a few years ago, the commission amended the regulations making it possible to use the B.Ed. qualification, with first division, to promote to higher positions. Promotion would lead to career advancement, financial rewards or pay rise, and social prestige. During the field work, I identified that students at CDET represented various ministries and government organisations such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Local Development, the Inland Revenue Department, the Election Commissions, the Public Service Commissions, and District administration and educational offices. The largest number of students enrolled for the School Management and Supervision subject, mainly because the course entails a practicum component, and the subject did not require them to participate in classroom Teaching Practice. As described earlier, because of the practicum component and internal assessment provision in the course, most students also believed that they could pass the exam with first division

I also discover that very few students registered for the course with a view to attain teacher certification and the teaching licence examination. The cost of the distance B.Ed. is almost four times higher than the one-year B.Ed. programme at Tribhuvan University. Therefore, it could be argued that due to the comparatively high cost, the course failed to attract a significant number of prospective teachers:

*As the course fee is considerably high, not all individuals who want to pursue B.Ed. [at CDET] can afford it... I feel that the course should also recognise and acknowledge low-income groups. The college policy guidelines say that the college wants to provide educational opportunities to people deprived of higher education and training but at the same time it is excluding some groups. The course is designed for prospective teachers and therefore, it should contemplate its target groups.*

[Sirjana]

In summary, students' responses to questionnaire, and interviews revealed that students selected the course:

- a. Because of the accessibility, flexibility and convenience of the course (e.g., students live and work in a rural or remote area with limited access to higher educational opportunities, or they have other issues preventing them from attending regular on-campus classes, they can study at a time and place that suits them, and they can continue to learn while fulfilling their commitments to work and family)
- b. To enhance their promotion prospects or to prepare for career change
- c. To acquire teaching knowledge and skills, and to obtain teacher certification
- d. To acquire experiences from a new educational institution
- e. To acquire professional knowledge and skills, and improve their research, management and supervision skills

One civil officer, although not presently engaged in teaching, considered that teacher education was an attractive sector, and that after his retirement he hopes to become involved in this field. However, most interviewees expressed that they were undertaking the course as a means to their job promotion rather than for future career in teaching. Perhaps because of the low salary

status, teaching profession appears to have been considered as secondary or inferior to other professions in Nepal.

### **6.2.1 Relevance and usefulness of the course**

From the perspective of job promotion, participants pointed out that the course was very effective and useful. However, since an overwhelming majority of participants were not engaged, or going to engage in the teaching profession, I had asked them about the extent to which they believe the course was helpful to enhance knowledge and skills related to their professional lives. Some interviewees, working as bureaucrats or government employees, expressed the belief that the course promotes their administrative and management skills while others argued that the course was relevant to their professions in that it helped enhance research and presentation skills.

*I found that knowledge and skills covered by the programme are useful even in the public service sector. For example, my specialisation subject at the college is School Management and Supervision – the majority of students choose this as their subject of specialism – and management and supervision skills acquired in the course can also be transferred to my job as well.*

[Rabindra]

*The course taught how to organise and manage my office and its members of staff. With the knowledge of administration and management, I feel that the course has helped me to function as a good bureaucrat. As administration and management skills are essential in my field, I find the course very useful and relevant to my present job as well.*

[Dinesh]

The next comment from another student shows that the course was beneficial to students due its practical nature (i.e., requiring students to undertake small research projects, which in turn may help in acquiring higher grades), and due to the fact that it may help improve students' research and presentation skills, and school supervision skills.

*I remind you of the saying in Nepali: “ढुंगा खोज्दा देउता मिल्यो - dhungaa khojdaa Deutaa milyo” [lit. searching for a stone but found god instead – meaning: to find something more valuable than one has expected]. I exactly feel that way. Unlike B.Ed. offered by other universities, this course has a practical and practicum part. It provides students with some knowledge of research methods, action research and presentation skills as well... My job responsibility also includes monitoring and supervision of schools in this district and, also at times, to provide training for teachers. My profession has a direct link with schools and teachers. Therefore, I feel that the course has been tailored to my professional needs.*

[Sujan]

Although some school teachers, and student teachers, interviewed expressed the view that the course was very useful for enhancing their teaching skills and professional development as teachers, one school teacher reported that he was disappointed with the fact that it was not always possible to apply the knowledge acquired from the course into Nepalese classroom contexts:

*I definitely feel that the course has helped improve my teaching skills and that I teach better now...The course has helped me understand the learning needs of students who come from diverse backgrounds. It has also enhanced my skills of classroom management. As there are over 50 students in my classroom, and due to the congested*



*classrooms and lack of resources and other facilities in school, it is not always possible to apply what I have learnt. For example, student-centred activities such as group work, pair work, and discussion cannot be used in a way that is described in teacher's guides.*

[Mohan]

Similarly, another student, who was teaching in a government school after acquiring the B.Ed. qualification, shared the similar concern:

*I think the course should enable prospective teachers to better function in school classrooms. Although the course provided knowledge about English Language teaching methodologies and student assessment techniques, I felt that the B.Ed. course contents and school curriculum was not closely linked. Additionally, because of the lack adequate physical facilities and learning resources and large number of students in school classroom, I mostly rely on traditional methods of teaching.*

[Binita]

The issue of a theory and practice gap seems to be a common issue in Nepalese educational contexts. NCED (2007), while investigating the effectiveness of its teacher training programmes, identified that the relationship between school classroom practice and teacher preparation courses was poor. Because of crowded classrooms, poor educational infrastructure and the lack of adequate learning resources, many school teachers, mostly in government schools, are experiencing problems of utilising the acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes from teacher training courses into classroom practice in the existing circumstances. As described in Chapter Two, realising the need to improve school infrastructure the Nepal government has recently introduced a School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2015) for expanding

access to and quality of school education. However, as I discuss below, higher educational institutions in Nepal in general, and CDET centres in particular, are also faced with similar challenges and problems.

Nevertheless, as the sections below reveal, although most shared the perspective that the course was very useful and relevant to their professional needs, students identified many issues and concerns about aspects of the programme, and problems they experienced whilst studying at the CDET.

### **6.3 Educational infrastructure and facilities**

It may be argued that educational infrastructural facilities such as college/study centre buildings, library and learning resources, communication media and ICT facilities, lecture rooms, staff rooms, electricity, laboratories, instructional materials and resources, postal services and transport play a significant role in the effective delivery of DE programmes. However, during my fieldwork, I observed that for a variety of reasons CDET and its study centres, were operating with a very poor educational infrastructure and facilities. All the students I approached highly appreciated the CDET authorities for their initiatives on teacher education through distance mode and they also recognised the poor socio-economic, diverse geographical and unstable political contexts in which CDET is functioning. However, they complained that the institute lacked even minimum infrastructure and facilities to run the distance B.Ed. programme. For example, most students were concerned with the inadequacy and appropriateness of physical facilities and learning resources; poor learning environment due to class sizes and conditions in classrooms, and low availability of and access to ICT facilities in the college and study centres.

*There are not adequate facilities and resources to address students learning needs. It is necessary to have adequate learning resources and materials... The centre has a book self which contains about 10/15 books and some of them are not even related to the course... I also feel that the university should ensure that educational institutions and colleges provide a minimum educational infrastructure before being granted affiliation, or being given permission to run the programme.*

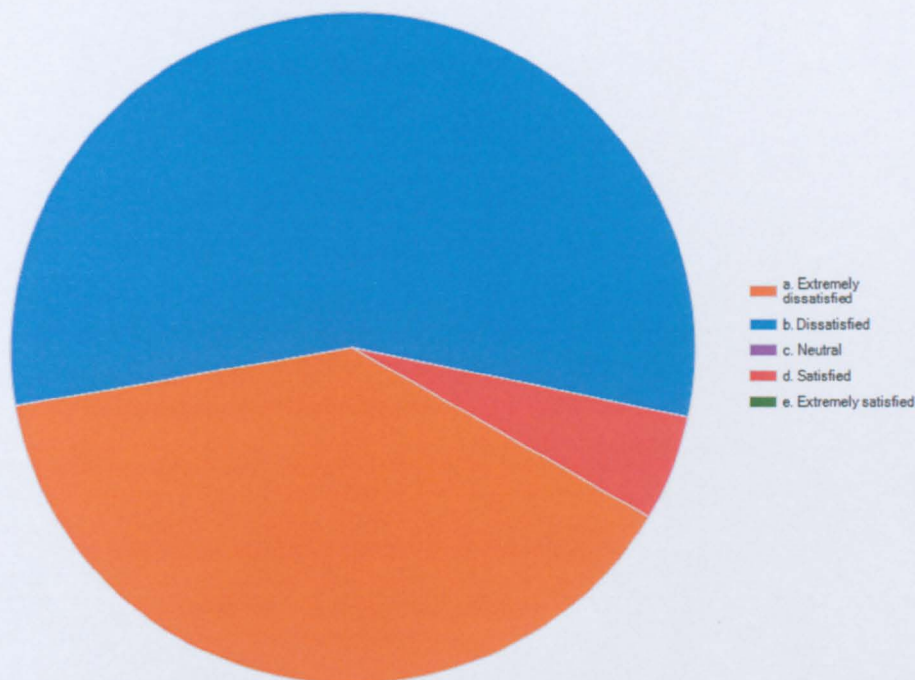
[Nirmal]

Nirmal pointed out a significant issue. It is crucial to check whether the institution has adequate resources such as physical, technological, materials and learning resources, and human resources to run the programme effectively and with due regard to quality during the programme or course approval process. However, while talking with the CDET founders I understood that CDET was founded with limited human resources, and basic educational infrastructure and facilities for the administrative and academic functions of the college. Although the college has made some improvements over the past 8 years, there are many infrastructure issues it still has to consider and many students suggested that the college should improve its infrastructure and learning conditions.

As discussed in the previous chapter, study materials provided to students lacked comprehensive coverage, they were difficult to follow or even non-existent and supplementary materials were unavailable in the college library. For that reason, many students mentioned that they had to consult textbooks from TU. In such circumstances, it becomes essential for an educational institution to have a well-equipped library, where possible even at local level:

*Since Self-Study-Materials are not self-sufficient and lack adequate depth, references and other supplementary materials should have been made available in the library. There was no library at my study centre.*

Library and learning resources should be tailored to the needs of distance students, academic and other staff members, yet a library was almost non-existence in CDET and its study centres, apart from the fact that some centres had a few books, dictionaries and some assignments submitted by students of the previous academic years. As can be seen in the Figure 7 below, questionnaire responses also showed that 39.2% and 55.9% of students were either ‘extremely dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’, respectively, with the library and learning resources available at CDET and its local study centres.



**Figure 7: Student satisfaction with library facilities**

Students, who were busy with work, study and family commitments, expected at least prescribed books and some references materials in the college library:

*At least, a library should hold some course books and reference materials related to the course. Because of job, family circumstances or other practical difficulties, not all students can go to other places searching for books and materials. I think at least books*

*prescribed by the course syllabus should be available at the library.... The classrooms are dark. The space is congested and difficult to get fresh air. There is only one toilet common to male and female and we have to queue up during the break time. I am not happy with the library facilities and learning environment at all.*

[Sirjana]

In the excerpt above, apart from poor library facilities, Sirjana raises other issues regarding the learning environment. In fact, the college and study centres were conducting contact session tutorials in rented properties built for residential purposes, rather than for the purpose of education. In some centres, lecture rooms were congested and too dark to conduct the tutorials. Due to the high number of students in the Kathmandu centre, and because of congested and limited number of classrooms and inadequate tutors, the centre had divided the students into four groups, and was conducting contact sessions at different times for each group. Problems with a lack of toilets, drinking water, and canteen facilities were also evident. The Nuwakot centre did not have its own office room, and was hiring classrooms from a public school for its tutorials. The Butwal centre was struggling to meet the operation costs and the study centre office was moved to the centre co-ordinator's residence.

*As college could not afford to rent a property, contact sessions were later held at the centre co-ordinator's residence, and so the learning environment was not appropriate for an educational institute...Facilities and learning resources were very poor. Library and learning facilities were very poor and students were left to struggle on their own.*

[Mohan]

Additionally, all centres were experiencing a limited electricity supply due to power cuts. Sometimes tutors simply would have no other option but rely on talks/lectures. Chitwan and

Pokhara centre contact sessions were held in block walled classrooms with tin-roofs, and during power cuts, it was difficult for students and tutors to cope with the heat and actively engage in the tutorials:

*Tin-roofed classroom too hot and when there is no [regular] electricity supply and fans [in classrooms], it is very hot and students often feel sleepy.*

[Tutor: OQR]

Some students complained that CDET ‘neglected’ their learning needs and suggested that the college/university should ensure minimal educational infrastructure and facilities, and the use of technology to support DL:

*I think that the centre has neglected the needs of students. The responsibility of the college is not just to enrol and teach students, it also should manage and provide facilities needed to support their learning... There should be a well-equipped library so that students can consult references and other materials and develop analytical and critical thinking. I think, to make learning and teaching more effective, the use of communication technology is essential as such technology allows students connect to their tutors, the college and other staff via email... I know this B.Ed. programme is unique and such a programme should be run in a unique way, such as using new technology, and providing better support to students, tutors and administrative staff.*

[Shyam]

New communication technologies are widely used by the DE institutions in developed countries to support learning and teaching, however, CDET and its study centres were not be able to utilise such educational technologies in the distance B.Ed. course. Many students perceived that the use of ICT, at least email/internet facility, is essential to communicate with

the college, academic and other support staff. Some students commented that the use of ICT would help in receiving timely support and feedback through communication with tutors and other staff, while others perceived that ICT would increase opportunities for interaction from remote locations. For example:

*We are not accustomed to using technology... only a few of our tutors had access to it and others do not have even e-mail [addresses]. I think we have not understood the importance of integrating ICT in education. ICT should be introduced and I think there is a need to provide ICT training to students and tutors as well...I can see the advantage of using technology, particularly in this type of distance mode programme. For example, if our tutors had access to internet, students would not have to wait for contact sessions to discuss issues and problems that are hindering their study. We could receive feedback on our assignments via e-mail.*

[Rabindra]

*At CDET, students represent all districts of Nepal, and most of the students are government employees. I am working in KTM now, but I may be transferred to any [district] education office at any time... So communication technology such as email/internet is essential for us. Internet facilities are available at most of the district headquarters. Therefore, it would be good if they [CDET] can make use of at least email/internet to connect with students even if they are transferred to remote locations for their tenures.*

[Sirjana]

Sirjana indicated that in a country where transfer of government officers is highly likely every time the county experiences a change in government, and therefore new communication

technology would create the opportunity for increased student-tutor-staff interaction, and therefore the use of ICT could play a crucial role in terms of getting help and staying connected from remote and isolated places.

Another student reported that although he had access to computer and internet at his office and some tutors were responsive to his queries, because of the lack of time, lack of access to internet at home, or due to unreliable electricity supply, he could not effectively utilise email/internet:

*CDET has poor resources and has not been able to introduce Information and communication Technology (ICT) in the course. Use of ICT in education could have been a separate course/module in its own right in distance education programme... I used to contact Tutors and administrators in Kathmandu centre through emails from my office. I also received two-three emails replies but ...because of my personal circumstances such as due to my full-time job, lack of internet access at home, and limited electricity supply, I did not have time to respond to follow-up emails.*

[Dinesh]

Despite the poor educational infrastructure and physical facilities, as the next comment illustrates, some students appreciated the alternative educational provision introduced by CDET, the friendly nature of tutors and networking opportunities:

*Students have not received the facilities in accordance with the fees we have paid to the institute. It's like 'मुटु माथि ढुङ्गा राखी हास्नु पर्या छ' - mutu maathi dhungaa raakhi haasnu parya chha' (lit. one is trying to smile despite heavy rock on his/her heart', meaning: maintain a smile despite severe pain.) I can use my free time to study, I have received an educational opportunity which may fulfil my professional needs, tutors are friendly*



*and also I have found friends working in various government offices which is good for networking. I am happy in that sense.*

[Sujan]

One respondent diplomatically suggested that government support and political stability is important to attract investment in education in order to improve educational infrastructure, redesign the curriculum and integrate ICT to enhance distance learning and teaching:

*There is a need for drawing the government's attention towards the importance of distance education in Nepal to create a favourable environment to invest in education so that physical infrastructure could be renovated, curriculum could be innovated, and technology could be used for learning teaching and teacher training.*

[OQR]

However, as discussed above, many students at CDET reported that the main practical impediments precluding the use of new communication technologies to support DL were the cost, limited access, lack of skills and training opportunities to use them, a limited electricity supply, and lack of understanding of the importance of ICT in facilitating learning and teaching at a distance. Additionally, since many students, tutors and administrators at CDET were not accustomed to using educational technologies, there seemed to be a need to provide ICT training to students, tutors and other support members so that such technologies could be used in better ways to facilitate DL.

Communication technologies have their own strengths and weaknesses, and they are a means to an end, but not end in themselves. Drawing on many examples in the literature that has been reviewed in Chapter Three, and observations put forward by many educators, it can be argued that new communication technologies can create increased opportunities for student-student

and student-tutor-staff interactions, and enhance distance education experiences (Bates, 2005; Beldarrain, 2006; Hillman et al., 1994). The Table 15 below also indicates the fact that students recognised that the use of computer and internet, use of multimedia and audio-video devices, use of mobile phones and online discussion forums could significantly contribute to DL.

**Table 15: Perceived usefulness of new communication technology**

Perceived usefulness	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
Use of computer and internet	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (1)	46.3% (25)	50.0% (27)	4.43	54
Multimedia and audio/video devices	1.9% (1)	3.8% (2)	11.5% (6)	59.6% (31)	23.1% (12)	3.98	52
Use of mobile phones	0.0% (0)	1.8% (1)	7.1% (4)	69.6% (39)	21.4 % (12)	4.11	56
Online discussion forum	2.1% (1)	12.8% (6)	23.4% (11)	57.4% (27)	4.3% (2)	3.49	47
Skipped questions							3

**Note:** 1=useless, 2= not very useful, 3=somewhat useful 4=very useful, 5=extremely useful

Additionally, as discussed in Chapter Three, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has been recognised as one of the key elements in DE. For example, scholars claim that ICT plays a crucial role in facilitating two-way communication and supporting students on DL courses (e.g., Keegan, 1996; Holmberg, 2007), in formulating the learning communities to build connections between the prospective teachers as well as sharing resources (Barab and Kling, 2004; Wenger, 1998), and in delivering distance education courses effectively. Robinson (2008) found that the use of DE provision and ICT helped improve access, equity and quality in professional development for rural teachers in China. In Nepal,

however, the use of ICT is often inhibited by various factors, such as high cost, lack of access, and ‘load-shedding’, and landline telephone services not being available to most of the population. Nevertheless, as the use of cell phones is rapidly growing, this technology could be useful for facilitating DE in Nepal. It has been argued that one of the advantages to (Nepal) being a “less-developed nation with a strong motivation to engage in technological change is the ability to learn from the experience of others and leapfrog over their early mistakes” (Rennie and Mason, 2007). Therefore, the Nepal government should consider developing policies to exploit and use mobile technology, probably drawing on the experiences of other South Asian countries (Shrestha, 2011).

#### **6.4 Administration and management**

It can be argued that administrative effectiveness and efficiency is a vital part of any educational institution. Scholars have proposed a range of approaches to assess the ‘effectiveness’ of an organisation (Cameron, 1980; Daft et al., 2010). For example, following these scholars, *the goal based approach* to organisational effectiveness is concerned with how well an organisation accomplishes its goals; *the resource based approach* focuses on the extent to which the organisation acquires and manages its resources (e.g., physical, technological, human, and financial) necessary for higher performances; *the internal processes approach* looks at the extent to which internal operations or the functioning of an organisation is ‘healthy’ and efficient, information flow is smooth and members are highly integrated into its system; and *the strategic constituencies approach* is concerned with the extent to which the organisation responds to the demands and expectations of its constituencies or stakeholders (e.g., students and tutors of CDET, in the context of my research). Assessing whether CDET have been successful in achieving their overall goal is beyond the scope of this research and I have only explored one programme out of several academic programmes offered by the

university. I discussed some aspects of the CDET infrastructure, facilities and resources in the previous section. In this section, I explore students' views regarding the internal operations of CDET and the administration and management system, and whether or not the CDET administration and management system have satisfied the needs, demands and expectations of their students.

Although students recognised and appreciated the efforts made by CDET in providing a valid alternative for teacher education, and opportunities for career development, they were very concerned about the way in which the programme was organised and managed. Students mentioned that their experiences of the administrative aspects of BirMet were not positive, and they were not satisfied with the internal operations and administrative services. Students in interviews, and open-ended questionnaire (which asked the students what they disliked about the programme, and about the areas that needed improvement) responses, used words such as 'weak', 'poor', 'unresponsive', 'uncooperative', and 'corrupt' to describe the CDET administration and management system. UNESCO (2007) reports that some of the internal factors that contribute to corruption in education sectors include absence of clear norms and regulations, lack of transparent administrative procedures, lack of professional norms, low salary and weak incentive system, low management capacity, and lack of public information. Based on student views, some of these factors seem to relate to BirMet administration.

#### **6.4.1 Academic calendar and examination results**

The most frequent of the students' complaints was in regard to the management and the academic calendar of the university, examination timetables and the publication of results. The university had published an academic calendar but it was not following the timetable it had set. For example, students from the previous academic year were waiting for their practicum viva dates. Due to the delay in conducting the practicum viva, and publication of the examination

results, students were uncertain about their promotion possibilities as they needed to receive the qualification before the promotion application deadline, or it would be too late for some to make arrangements for the next stage of their studies. For example, Sirjana highlighted this when she said:

*I think the university has not followed its academic calendar strictly. I know last year's students have been waiting for their viva and other students have not received their results yet. Students have their own plans, and they miss important career opportunities when the university does not implement its academic calendar. It has created confusion, uncertainty and frustration in students. This is a very sensitive issue. Because of the delay in conducting viva, and publishing exam results, students who have enrolled for the course to obtain a qualification for promotion or for further studies, will not be able to fulfil their dreams. So I think the university should be more responsible and committed in its goals and missions.*

Devendra commented that he was psychologically affected and feared that the delays in conducting examinations and publication of exam results may prevent them from benefiting from the results:

*Students in previous years say that they have not yet received their exam results, that their practicum viva has not been conducted, and that BirMet does not follow its academic calendar. Therefore, because of the negligence of the university, it seems that even my expectations are not going to be fulfilled. I also have a psychological fear and sometimes feel that my time, money and labour will be wasted if I cannot obtain the qualification on time, which is essential for my job promotion.*

[Devendra]

*Because of the lack of a standard academic calendar, students have become like passengers without a destination.* [OQR]

Dinesh said:

*I am a confused about when my exam results are going to be published. It has been nearly a year now since the university conducted the final written examination, and still today, our viva for practicum has not been conducted.*

Because of the long and uncertain gap between the examination time and the result publication time, many students expressed their frustration and were very critical of the CDET administration. During the fieldwork, I met many students who expressed anxieties, doubts, fears, confusion and uncertainties about successfully completing the course on time. Some students reported that they formed a deputation and went to the university to complain about the exams system, viva and result timetable, and to put pressure on the university management to make the necessary arrangements to conduct the examination and public results quickly, but they were told that the university would solve the issues through talk with the CDET centre authorities. I was also aware that some students working at the MoE were seeking assistance from the then minister of Education, and were making a request to him to make a phone call and inquire about the issues.

I used to frequently encounter groups of students at CDET local study centres complaining about their viva and other issues. On one occasion, on my routine visit to Pokhara study centre, I met a group of ex-students, who were frustrated about delays in viva and exam results, warning the centre co-ordinator that they would padlock the centre if the university did not listen to their problems and if their practicum viva was not conducted immediately. As discussed in Chapter Two, various groups including students would call Banda, and even padlock education institution gates to draw attention to their problems and demands. In the last

few years, the Banda culture has flourished in Nepal because some groups consider that the government, political parties and other authorities respond to their problems and issues only if they instigate Banda and strikes.

Nevertheless, Mohan, a student who completed the course in 2008 told me that ‘his batch were lucky in the sense that the exam and viva was conducted on time’ in that academic year. According to the college authorities, that was the time when CDET enrolled only about 90-100 students and the majority of them had a genuine interest in teaching and were taking the course to gain teaching qualifications.

#### **6.4.2 CDET and BirMet conflicts and lack of cooperation**

In the past few years student enrolment at CDET has increased significantly, and most students who enrol onto the programme belong to government offices. According to the college authorities, some university officers were under the impression that the college was making a profit and therefore, they were demanding remuneration from the college. According to the CDET authorities, when the college refused their requests, some university officers deliberately created obstacles to the usual operation of the college. There were also news reports, in some of the national media, about corruption at the university. Rabindra a student and an officer at the MoE who was very aware about CDET and BirMet conflicts, said that:

*I feel that there is an alliance of ‘the greedy and traitors’ [within the university]. Because of the alliance our futures are going to be ruined. You know, corruption in our country is not limited to the government and political leaders. We students are also suffering from it... The institute should be committed in their mission goals and objectives. Educational leadership and management should not work for individual benefit. Educational endeavours should not be taken as a game. The university and the*

*college should identify their weaknesses; they should reflect on their goals and objectives; and should be clear about how these problems and issues can be addressed.*

Like Rabindra, most students interviewed believed that the internal operation of the university was not 'healthy' and this had adversely affected them and their plans. Because of the conflicts between the university and CDET authorities, students were desperately waiting for their practicum viva dates, as I was coming to the end of my field work. Another interviewee also emphasised the need for collaboration and cooperation between the college, study centres and the university leadership and staff, in attaining programme goals, sustain its future and to demonstrate its commitment for quality. For example:

*I think to sustain the future of the course and institutions, BirMet and CDET should co-ordinate with each other, and work hard to improve the quality of the programme and the teaching.*

[Sujan]

*It is [not] very difficult to understand why Birmet has not been able to implement the programme, and improve administrative efficiency. There is no good connection and coordination between the university, CDET Kathmandu and other centres, and its academic and other staff.*

[Shyam]

It is an unfortunate fact that, in Nepal, the appointment of university academics is often governed by politics, with political parties appointing their favoured candidates. Therefore, a change in government is likely to have consequences for important positions in universities, such as Vice Chancellor, Registrar, and Dean. This situation seems lead to conflicts in institutions of higher education, which could affect the smooth functioning of these institutions.



During informal talks with them, students and administrators pointed out that politicians should not meddle in the affairs of the university and the college and allow them to function independently without any interference.

#### **6.4.3 Length of course completion time**

Another issue raised by the students was the length of course completion time. Since the university does not strictly follow its academic calendar, students feared that they would not be able to complete the course within the time frame of one year. For example, Suresh expressed that:

*To make this programme strong enough, the university must be committed on its duties and responsibilities...I am compelled to say that the university operates randomly. The one year course takes two-three years to complete sometimes... It's painful to live with uncertainties.*

Another student shared the similar view:

*The management system should be improved significantly so that the exam and exam result can be published on time and that on year programme does not take 2/3 years to complete.*

[OQR]

#### **6.4.4 A poor record keeping system**

Students during interviews also expressed their concerns about the lack of a systematic record keeping system and a failure of the university to capture the students' assessment and examination results records into the recordkeeping system.

*I sat for examination two years ago, but still haven't received the qualification, and I am not sure if I have to re-take the examination. Perhaps, I would have been happier if I failed the practicum exams.*

[Suresh]

Suresh was referring to the flawed mark-sheet/transcript he received. He was dissatisfied with the CDET administration, particularly because, although he passed all written examinations and took all practical examinations, he was surprised to find that his transcript stated 'absent' for all practicum subjects. However, it was not only Suresh who was affected; another student also reported that the study centre lost his transcript sent by the university:

*I had a serious concern about my transcript. It happened after I completed the course. I was told by the college that my transcript was lost on its way from the university to the college. They did not know what happened. I urgently needed the transcript as I had to apply for the teacher licencing exam, and without it the exam form would not be accepted by the Teacher Licence Commission. I rang the college many times, sometimes I was told to contact Kathmandu centre or the University. Finally, the college managed to acquire a fax-copy of the transcript from the university and I managed to apply for the teaching licence exam. It's more than a year since the incident took place, yet I have not received the original transcript.*

[Mohan]

Students were critical about not receiving appropriate administrative help when they encountered such administrative problems. Suresh explained to me that he requested that the local study centre resolve his problems, but was told to talk to CDET authorities in Kathmandu, and the main centre authorities told him to go to the university, requiring a 14-15 hours bus journey, with a copy of his practicum mark-sheet. Although he travelled to the university, the

university administration told him that they could not help him personally. Suresh even requested me to travel to the university thinking that the university authorities may listen to my voice and help solve his problems. Students suggested that the study centres should be more responsible, provide personalised administrative support when needed, and that there should be good communication between the university, the college and its study centres.

#### **6.4.5 Inadequate administrative staff**

Students also identified the need for adequate, more helpful and cooperative administrative staff, and the availability of administrative staff during office hours:

*It is difficult to meet administrative staff outside the contact sessions period in this centre. The centre co-ordinator and resource person are not accessible when students have administrative and other problems. The college office only opens during the contact sessions.*

[Devendra]

*The centre was under-resourced... Administrative work was handled by the centre co-ordinator's wife who was also a full-time teacher at a local college... There should be full-time administrative and support staff at the college. It's not possible for all students to go to central office to resolve administrative issues or get support. At least one administrative staff should be available during office hours.*

[Mohan]

*There was only one member of administrative staff in the centre, and he used to be busy handling administrative stuff mainly related to Open School students. Most of the time, he would not be able to answer my queries. I did not get much help from the local study centre when I received my faulty transcript.*

I also observed that there was discrepancies between the administrative services which the main and local tutorial centres were able to provide due to inadequate administrative staffing levels. While the main centre employed four full-time administrative staff, other local study centres mostly relied on centre-coordinators for handling administrative, academic and other issues. Most of the centres were suffering from under-staffing and the centre office would mostly open only during the contact session. Due understaffing, and the lack of experienced and well-trained administrative staff for delivering adequate support to learners, students said that they were dissatisfied with the administrative efficiency of CDET and its study centres.

#### **6.4.6 Exam centre at local level**

Certain forms of mal-practice and corruption are likely to occur when the exam centres are small and remote. For example, UNESCO (2007) points out that payment of bribes in order to obtain a good mark is likely to be observed at local level. However, students expressed the view that exam centres need to be easily accessible. CDET local study centre students were required to travel to Kathmandu or other locations for their final written examination. The locations of exam centres were not convenient for the students of Pokhara, Butwal, and Nuwakot centres. Because of the frequent Banda/strikes, and the cost of the hotel accommodation during the exam periods, students highlighted the need for an exam centre at local level. For example:

*I think that an exam centre should be available at local level. Exam period lasted for about a month, and due to Banda and other strikes, it was difficult for us to travel to the exam centre.*

*We had to travel to Kathmandu for our final written examination and hotel accommodation was expensive, and the hotel environment was not suitable for a person preparing for the examination. I do not understand why the university cannot use its constituent/affiliated college buildings, at local level, for the exam purpose.*

[Dinesh]

#### **6.4.7 Quality assurance mechanism**

A quality assurance mechanism is essential to sustain, maintain and improve the overall quality of the educational programme. As discussed above, because of the lack of a proper quality assurance and monitoring mechanism, some students believe that the university is operating 'randomly', is 'unresponsive', and 'irresponsible'. Students expressed their concern about the programme monitoring mechanism of CDET and emphasised that the university should monitor administrative functions of all study centres to ensure the programme quality and standard. For example:

*I would like to see the programme be of an international standard... BirMet must improve its standards. CDET and the university should also establish a monitoring mechanism, and a quality assurance board to ensure and maintain, the programme quality.*

[Shyam]

*The university has been extremely careless about its own programme... It should regularly monitor all regional centres and their activities*

[Dinesh]

*To my knowledge, contact sessions are never monitored. I do not know much about how other aspects of the programme is monitored. The programme should be reviewed on a regular basis to identify weakness and improve its quality... BirMet should strictly monitor the programme and conduct follow-up activities.*

[Sujaan]

## **6.5 Student assessment and feedback mechanism**

In the previous chapter, I explored issues related to constructive alignment. In this section, I particularly focus on transparency of assessment provisions at CDET, and opportunities for students to receive feedback from tutors. Transparency and fairness in assessment depends on the extent to which expectations, marking criteria and rubrics, and the standard required are clearly and explicitly communicated to students before they take an assessment task (Butcher, et al, 2006; Race, 2007).

Section Six (Q. 17-21) in the student questionnaire investigated the perspectives of students on the nature of assessment, and the opportunities for students to receive feedback and comments on their work. As shown in the Table 16 below, the majority of the students were critical of the lack of clear marking criteria and lack of transparency in marking of assignments, inadequate opportunity for receiving feedback, and heavy workload. Students reported that the course did not contain assessment guides, and therefore they were not clear about what was expected in the assignment and assessment tasks. Therefore, it is important to provide assessment guidelines to distance learners making explicitly clear the purpose of the assignment, or assessment tasks, how they can best approach them, what it is the tutors are looking for, the length of assignment, the marking criteria, and how much credit (if any) from it would be aggregated into the final assessment decision.

**Table 16: Students responses on assessment and feedback**

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
The course entails clear and detailed assignment and assessment guidelines.	8.6% (5)	<b>58.6%</b> <b>(34)</b>	13.8% (8)	17.2% (10)	1.7% (1)	2.45	58
It was often hard to understand what was expected of me on this course	1.7% (1)	24.1% (14)	13.8% (8)	<b>53.4%</b> <b>(31)</b>	6.9% (4)	3.40	58
Marking criteria for assessment are explicit and clear.	6.8% (4)	<b>71.2%</b> <b>(42)</b>	5.1% (3)	15.3% (9)	1.7% (1)	2.34	59
Feedback on my work helped me reflect on my progress and identify areas for improvement	8.5% (5)	<b>37.3%</b> <b>(22)</b>	25.4% (15)	25.4% (15)	3.4% (2)	2.78	59
I feel that the grading of assignments/assessment tasks has been fair.	6.9% (4)	<b>63.8%</b> <b>(37)</b>	13.8% (8)	10.3% (6)	5.2% (3)	2.43	58
I rarely receive comments and feedback	5.2% (3)	31.0% (18)	12.1% (7)	<b>46.6%</b> <b>(27)</b>	5.2% (3)	3.16	58
I believe that constructive feedback on my assignments is essential in order to check my progress in the course and to identify areas for improvement.	0.0% (0)	6.8% (4)	6.8% (4)	<b>67.8%</b> <b>(40)</b>	18.6% (11)	3.98	59
In my experience, the workload is heavy because too much study is required.	0.0% (0)	3.4% (2)	13.6% (8)	<b>57.6%</b> <b>(34)</b>	25.4% (15)	4.05	59
Skipped questions							0

Note: 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neutral 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

In order to cross-check what students reported in the questionnaire, I also explored these issues in interviews. Students in the interviews also desired feedback, but considered that the feedback mechanism was poor. Students expressed concerns about the lack of transparency in the marking of their assignments and heavy workload.

### 6.5.1 Desirability of feedback and comments by CDET students

Some studies have revealed that students may not always follow tutors' comments and feedback for various reasons: either because they have insufficient understanding of academic discourse to interpret comments accurately or the feedback does not contain enough to guide or motivate students (Weaver, 2006), or because of their inability to apply feedback on a current assignment successfully to future work (Chetwynd and Dobbyn, 2011). However, other studies suggest that students value feedback and find it useful (Chetwynd and Dobbyn, 2011; Walker, 2009). Students at CDET also identified that constructive, prompt and timely feedback and appropriate evaluation of their assignments is vital for their learning and progress.

*In my own experience, I have not received feedback on every assignment although I submitted assignments on time. When I have received feedback, it does not identify weaknesses or indicate areas for further improvement. However, tutors do correct Multiple Choice Questions, but I have not received detailed comments on my assignments. I think feedback is essential to identify strengths and weaknesses, communicate weaknesses to tutors, and improve further learning.*

[Sujan]

*As we [students] do not have regular contact with tutors, I think timely feedback on our assignments is very important to check our understanding and progress.*

[Suresh]



### 6.5.2 Little or no feedback on assignments

Several students described the feedback mechanism as very poor, with tutors failing to provide detailed comments on the assignments submitted by students, and sometimes simply saying that the work was 'ok':

*Our assignments were checked, but I rarely received comments from tutors. Tutors were engaged in teaching at other colleges as well, and were always busy....I received comments on 'Current Practices and Issues of Nepalese School Education System' but the comments were more to do with grammar than the content of the assignment. I had to re-write the assignment. I think I would have approached the assignment differently, had I known what was expected of me for that assignment. No guidance on writing the assignment was provided. I think a short briefing, about the task before the assignment, would have helped a lot.*

[Mohan]

*I have not received all of my assignments back yet. But I know that some of the answers to objective questions were corrected in my last assignment. I think I have written quite well and the tutors were satisfied with that so I did not find many comments. Otherwise they would have commented. Tutors have said OK on the assignment feedback I have received so far.*

[Sirjana]

*All the tutors at this centre are working on a part-time basis. So they do not provide much time for students and perhaps they do not feel that they have to carefully check our assignments and provide feedback.*

[Anup]

As illustrated above, students interpreted the reasons that tutors were not providing prompt, timely and detailed feedback on students' internal assignments and practicum works in three ways: a) they were too busy, and feel they cannot find the time to provide detailed feedback; b) they were satisfied with the quality of the assignments, c) tutors did not feel that it was their responsibility to provide feedback, because they were employed part-time. However, one student reported that he used to receive feedback and feedback from tutors helped identify areas to improve.

*When I submitted my research proposal and assignments of practical subjects, I had to review many times based on tutors feedback and comments before submitting the final versions. Tutors also used to highlight the areas that needed improvement.*

[Rabindra]

### **6.5.3 Fairness of assessment and marking criteria**

Because of the lack of assessment guides, explicit marking criteria, and the lack of feedback, some students questioned whether their assignments were assessed fairly. Students were critical about the lack of transparency in internal assessment of assignments:

*Tutors did not provide detailed comments on my assignments but simply said that 'the assessment is ok', or 'you have passed'. Because of the lack of explicit marking criteria internal assessments are marked subjectively, and tutors provide marks by looking at the face of the students which is unfair. I have to wait for the final exam results, and transcripts to see the marks on my internal assignments. Immediate constructive feedback on my assignments, along with marks awarded, would have helped me write the rest of the assignments in better ways.*

[Devendra]

*There is no fair system of student assessment and internal assessment is based on favouritism. The marking scheme is not clear and explicit.*

[OQR]

*I do not think that assignments are marked fairly. For example, I received 12 marks out of 20 marks in my first assignment but did not get any comments or explanation about why, and about how I could possibly do better in the next assignments.*

[Sujan]

During the field-work, several students explained that because of the lack of, or inadequate, feedback on their assignments, they were not sure how to improve their next assignments. Students also expressed that they failed to understand what 'ok' meant, and that the assignment tasks did not explicitly state what was expected from them:

*I feel, however, that there should be guidelines explaining assignment tasks and marking criteria. Because of the lack of assignment guidelines, I sometimes become confused as to how to approach the tasks to get better marks. In my opinion, in order to minimise the exam fear and anxiety in students, and to support their learning process, assignment guidelines are essential so that students know what is expected of them in the exam, or assignment tasks.*

[Shyam]

#### **6.5.4 Heavy workload**

Many students were very concerned that the work load was too heavy requiring too much study:

*I found the course very tough. In fact, I found it more labour intensive than a 3 year B.A. course. In the course, students were required to write assignments and also face final written examinations. I think it would have been better if students were assessed 50% by tutor marked assignments or other assessment methods, and 50% assessed by final examination. The work load was too heavy, and I found it difficult to manage time for work at home, office work and college work.*

[Prakash]

*At CDET, students have to write assignments in every theoretical subject and also work hard for final examinations, which is an irritating part. We have very limited time ... The course requires more time and labour. The work load is heavy. I have a full-time job, family and study. I find it very difficult to manage time for all these responsibilities.*

[Sirjana]

Many students suggested that CDET should review its student assessment system and employ varieties of student-centred and continuous assessment methods such as students' classroom activities, field-work activities, tutor marked assignments, workshop presentations, and student portfolios. They recommended that the course should not place too much emphasis on the formal or end-of-the-course written examination. Students also reported that a formal written examination promotes 'rote' learning and encourages 'memorisation' rather than help develop reflective or critical thinking. For example:

*The course has attached so much importance to formal written examination in theoretical subjects. I felt that such provision encourages rote learning and memory test. I am in my early 40s and I have weak memory power. I do not understand why the course team did not realise that self-assessment questions in SLMs, students' activities*

*during contact sessions, peer assessment, contact session homework, research papers/report presentation in the contact sessions, reflecting critically on research papers or other forms of assessment marked by tutors, could encourage students critical thinking and apply what they have learnt to practice.*

[Dinesh]

Students preferred formative assessment and believed that such assessment procedures would help improve their learning or tutor comments would help them to reflect on their own progress. Therefore, they suggested that there is a need to minimise the heavy reliance on summative assessment procedures. Additionally, some students also raised issues about the language of instruction, and language of the formal written examination questions. Because all subjects, excluding the English specialisation, are taught in Nepali, yet the final examination questions were written in English with the students writing their answers in Nepali, or English. Therefore, students reportedly found it confusing, and difficult to understand the questions. Furthermore, some of the students came from Sanskrit university and they had a relatively poor knowledge of English. All contact session tutorials except English subjects were held in Nepali, all SLMs except English were written in Nepali. Therefore, some students suggested that there should be a choice of language in the formal examination question paper.

*One particular problem I faced, and which other students reported, was the difficulty in understanding the final examination questions... I think that either CDET should have explained to students that they needed a certain level of English to study the course, or they should not have written the formal exam questions in English. Those students having poor English tend to acquire low marks or even fail the exam just because of not understanding the exam questions. I do not think this is fair.*

[Suresh]

Based on the above discussion, it appeared that, in order to ensure transparency and fairness in assessment practice, CDET should develop a course and student assessment handbook making expectations of assessment tasks, as well as marking criteria, clear to students. Butcher and his colleague (2006, pp. 99-100) suggest that transparency of the assessment can be improved by:

- Developing broad statements giving guidance on general expectations (e.g., assessment criteria, grade descriptors, guidance notes) and indicate what constitutes both a satisfactory and unacceptable performance;
- Providing accurate information, using jargon-free language, to students about their assessments (e.g., indicating word limits, weightings of different elements of an assessment, deadlines and any penalties for late submission, information about what constitutes cheating and/or plagiarism);
- By publishing the above information in a range of formats, such as written assignment briefings, course handbooks, or verbally in class.

Scholars have also argued that prompt, informative and constructive feedback on students' work is important in any institutional setting. The role of feedback becomes more important in DL courses where the learner is disadvantaged by the lack of casual contact with the teacher and other students (Galusha, 1997) and for many students, tutors comments on assignments may be the only interactional and communication opportunities they have with the tutor during their studies (Simpson, 2003). As discussed in Chapter Three, scholars have argued that detailed, friendly, helpful, and cooperative tutor comments, on submitted assignments, contribute to emotional involvement and to successful completion of the course (Holmberg, 2007) and the assignment feedback loop facilitates two-way communication between tutors and students, and tutor-student dialogue provides opportunities for students to question and exchange their views about assignment work, study progress and performance. Researchers

have suggested that the success of DE programme depends on effective communication between the tutor and learners, and giving and receiving adequate timely feedback helps increase and enhance interaction and communication between them (Rangecroft et al., 1999; Rangecroft et al.; 2002; Ortiz-Rodriquez et al., 2005). Sometimes it may be important to provide extended face-to-face interaction sessions to reinforce important concepts of course materials and to provide personalised feedback on their progress (Rangecroft et al, 2002). Nicola and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) have outlined seven principles of good feedback practice that support and develop self-regulation in students. These principles are intended to:

- a. help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);
- b. facilitate the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
- c. deliver high quality information to students about their learning;
- d. encourage teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
- e. encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
- f. provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
- g. provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching

Therefore, in order to bridge the gap between the current and desired performance, tutors feedback on assessment tasks is crucial. In this regard, CDET should reconsider the existing assessment provision and employ continuous as well as summative forms of assessment and make sure that students get opportunities to receive timely feedback and learn from it. As discussed below, although CDET has a provision of occasional face-to-face tutorials aimed at providing opportunities for student to receive support as well as clarify issues and problems by engaging in dialogue and discussion, students reported that the these tutorials rarely provided opportunities for interaction and discussion.

## **6.6 Student support services at CDET**

The literature on student support is abundant, and many scholars have put forward varieties of reasons for providing learner or student support in DE (Mills, 2003; Simpson, 2002; Tait, 2000). Simpson (2002, p. 6) defines student support as “all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies”. Similarly, Mills (2003, p. 105) defines learner support as “the totality of the provision by an institution to support the learner, other than generic teaching materials produced by instructional designers/course producers”. However, definitions provide by Mills and Simpson have been criticised for conceptualising learner support as being separate from the development of course materials (Hülsmann, 2004). In a development and under-resourced context, where students have limited contact and interaction opportunities with tutors and the DE intuitions, student support needs to be considered in the course development and needs to be integrated within the study materials. Simpson (2002) states that the support services can be academic (or tutorial support) and non-academic or counselling support and he further argues for practical (e.g., promote retention and lower dropout rates), theoretical (e.g., mitigating student isolation), and moral (e.g., obligation to assist students to overcome difficulties and to succeed) rationales for supporting students on DL courses. On the other hand, Tait (2000) describes three main functions of student support: cognitive (e.g., academic support through course materials and other resources); affective (e.g., providing a supportive environment for promoting commitment and self-esteem); and systemic (e.g., establishing easily accessible and student-friendly administrative) In other words, students on DL courses require cognitive support (academic), systemic support (administrative), and affective or emotional/personal support (e.g., counselling and guidance).



Rumble (2000) states that there are signs of a renewed interest in student support services because of student dropout, and student retention in this increasingly competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century, where students are considered as customers. Creed and his colleagues (2005, p. 11), proposed two approaches to student support in “low income contexts” (i.e. support within study materials, and support provided by tutors and fellow learners). They argue that in countries where there are major resource problems, where communications are difficult, where potential students are spread over large geographical areas and where there are few available tutors, the simple adoption of tried and tested models from industrialised countries can at best be unhelpful and at worst positively dangerous. In other words, they suggest to take caution when adopting the western models of support, most importantly the western notions of effectiveness and flexibility or the concept of 24/7 customer-centred services as such conceptions of support are not always possible to manage and organise in development and low/under-resourced contexts such as Nepal.

Nevertheless, there is a consensus that learner support is one of the keys to a high-quality DL experience (Corry, 2008). Since students on DL courses are separated from their instructors, and the institution offering the course, they are likely to need help and support with various aspects of their studies such as academic (e.g., providing tutorial or study support), administrative (e.g. providing basic information about the institution registration and admission procedures and processes), technical (e.g., providing help and guidance about the use software/hardware gadgets), and personal/emotional (e.g., providing guidance and counselling to overcome personal or emotional difficulties that affect their studies). Therefore, it is important to make sure that some form of learner support is integrated into the design of the programme as a whole (e.g., through interactive self-study materials and study guides for individual or group study, or through the provision of face-to-face contact sessions) and that learners have access to support before registration, during learning, and at the end of the

programme (COL, 2005). Support to distance students can be provided through a range of support mechanisms such as through interactive study materials and self-assessment tasks, orientation and contact session tutorials, feedback on assignments, provision of visiting tutors, buddy or peer group support systems, or through opportunities to participate in communities of learning. Student support can be delivered through a range of media such as printed study materials, phone, text messaging, TV/radio, email, online forum, study support groups or through social networking sites.

As discussed previously, Moore and Kearsley (1996) maintain that students should be given ample opportunities for interactions which contribute to the amount of transactional distance or help minimise the students' feelings of isolation, promote self-direction and increase the levels of motivation. Therefore, opportunities for interaction are an important aspect of learner support in DE programmes. The support provided to learners is determined by a wide range of factors and the levels of support available to students may vary considerably in high resource and low resource educational contexts. What follows next are students' experiences and stories of learner support services at CDET.

#### **6.6.1 Nature and forms of student support at CDET**

The CDET policy document stated that learner support was provided through study materials, face-to-face sessions (e.g., pre-admission and orientation sessions, contact session tutorials), via support staff or a resource person (RP) at study centres, and phone/mobile phone services and emails.

#### **6.6.2 Pre-admission counselling and orientation sessions**

A provision of face-to-face learner support was integrated into the CDET programme. CDET provided pre-admission counselling services to prospective students, and mandatory student

orientation programmes to all registered students through its main or local tutorial centres. Students found pre-admission counselling and the mandatory orientation sessions very informative and useful. For example, the following comments are representative of such views:

*Pre-admission counselling service provided a chance for me to discuss various aspects of the programme such as entry requirements, nature of the course, assessment system. I needed the qualification but I was not sure about the choice of elective subjects but the counselling service helped me choose my subject of specialisation.*

[Dinesh]

Many interviewees described how the pre-admission counselling service provided them with sufficient opportunities to clarify any doubts or concerns prior to making a formal decision to register into the course. During the informal talks with CDET authorities, they stated that it was not uncommon to come across prospective students displaying anxiety regarding Teaching Practice, and these students sometimes needed guidance and counselling support in the choice of their specialisation subjects. According to the tutors, these groups of students preferred to undertake specialisation subjects not involving Teaching Practice. Apart from providing information about administrative and academic matters, these sessions also provided them the opportunity to identify themselves with the institute, other students, tutors, and support staff:

*I really appreciate the student orientation session that was held at the local study centre. The study centre authorities provided information about the rules and regulations of the institution, about registration procedures and study materials, about the contact session tutorials, about assignments, about managing our studies. For me it was an important occasion to meet fellow students, tutors and other staff, and familiarise oneself with the institute and support services. Students were given*

*information about the possible time for contacting tutors and study centre co-ordinators or other staff along with their contact numbers and so on.*

[Suresh]

As shown in the Table 17 below, although most students were satisfied with the administration and enrolment process, they were dissatisfied with the level of student support received, and therefore considered that academic and administrative support at CDET needed improvement.

**Table 17: Level of agreement on student support**

Student support	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.	6.8% (4)	<b>55.9%</b> (33)	22.0% (13)	13.6% (8)	1.7% (1)	2.47	59
I have been able to contact the student support team when I needed to.	11.9% (7)	<b>47.5%</b> (28)	28.8% (17)	11.9% (7)	0.00% (0)	2.41	59
Where provided, the information and advice offered by student support services has been helpful.	5.1% (3)	22.0% (13)	25.4% (15)	<b>45.8%</b> (27)	1.7% (1)	3.17	59
I am satisfied with the course and careers advice provided.	5.1% (3)	<b>42.4%</b> (25)	23.7% (14)	25.4% (15)	3.4% (2)	2.80	59
The study centre administration is effective in supporting my study needs.	11.9% (7)	<b>54.2%</b> (32)	11.9% (7)	16.9% (10)	5.1% (3)	2.49	59
I am satisfied with the admission and enrolment processes.	3.4% (2)	34.5% (20)	13.8% (8)	<b>46.6%</b> (27)	1.7% (1)	3.09	59
I feel that guidance and support provided to me was not helpful.	5.1% (3)	30.5% (18)	16.9% (10)	<b>32.2%</b> (19)	15.3% (9)	3.22	59

There is no proper student support mechanism at the study centre.	6.9%	22.4%	8.6%	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	3.55	59
	(4)	(13)	(5)	<b>(19)</b>	<b>(17)</b>		
Skipped question							0

Likewise, as illustrated in the section below, students were very apprehensive about the fact that CDET administration had not been able to adequately support them in their studies. Students raised several issues such as poor tutorial quality, lack of subject specific expertise, inadequate support staff, and lack of planning and poor management of contact sessions.

### 6.6.3 Contact session tutorials

As discussed in my literature review, Holmberg (2007) argues that didactic conversation, or interaction between students and tutors or the supporting institution, is a crucial element of DL, and that face-to-face sessions can be fruitful either as a motivational device encouraging course completion, or as a purely instructional element, or both. Scholars argue that sometimes it may be important to arrange face-to-face sessions and provide extended face-to-face interaction to reinforce important concepts in the various subject areas (Ortiz-Rodriquez et al., 2005; Rangecroft et al., 1999, 2002) . Face-to-face tutorials were used as a predominant form of academic and administrative support at CDET, and students were required to attend 3 x 4-day mandatory tutorials at their main or local tutorial centres, mostly held on weekends or public holidays. However, students reported several concerns regarding the tutorials and tutor expertise.

#### 6.6.3.1 Quality of tutors and tutorials

The Table 18 demonstrates the level of agreement on tutor expertise and tutorial quality. Students confirmed that tutors possessed a good understanding of subject knowledge, and communicated their subject matter knowledge quite effectively. Tutors’ communication skills,

organisational skills, content presentation skills, and student assessment skills were rated as average. At the same time, students also reported that tutors lacked skills, and time, and were unwilling or unavailable to provide academic and personal support to distance learners. Moreover, 39%, 50.8%, and 8.5% rated the quality of tutorials as poor, fair and good, respectively.

**Table 18: Level of agreement on tutor expertise and tutorials**

	1	2	3	4	5	Rating average	Response count
Content (subject area) knowledge.	0.0% (0)	10.2% (6)	25.4% (15)	<b>59.3%</b> <b>(35)</b>	5.1% (3)	3.59	59
Knowledge about various methods of teaching	1.7% (1)	<b>42.4%</b> <b>(25)</b>	32.2% (19)	23.7% (14)	0.0% (0)	2.78	59
Tutors' responsiveness to your inquiries	11.9% (7)	<b>69.5%</b> <b>(41)</b>	5.1% (3)	13.6% (8)	0.0% (0)	2.20	59
Communication skills	0.0% (0)	24.1% (14)	<b>43.1%</b> <b>(25)</b>	31.0% (18)	1.7% (1)	3.10	58
Planning and organisational skills	1.7% (1)	29.3% (17)	<b>41.4%</b> <b>(24)</b>	25.9% (15)	1.7% (1)	2.97	59
Ability to clearly explain ideas/concepts	0.0% (0)	30.5% (18)	<b>40.7%</b> <b>(24)</b>	23.7% (14)	5.1% (3)	3.03	59
Skills and ability to use a variety of teaching methods and techniques	15.5% (9)	<b>48.3%</b> <b>(28)</b>	19.0% (11)	15.5% (9)	1.7% (1)	2.40	58
Skills to integrate ICT, where available	32.8% (19)	<b>51.7%</b> <b>(30)</b>	12.1% (7)	3.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	1.86	58
Ability to use of a range of assessment methods and techniques	1.7% (1)	28.8% (17)	<b>42.4%</b> <b>(25)</b>	22.0% (13)	5.1% (3)	3.00	59
Willingness to provide timely and constructive feedback	3.4% (2)	<b>66.1%</b> <b>(39)</b>	22.0% (13)	8.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	2.36	59



Ability to address your learning needs.	5.1% (3)	<b>79.7%</b> <b>(47)</b>	11.9% (7)	3.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.14	59
Willingness to provide personal support	0.0% (0)	<b>71.2%</b> <b>(42)</b>	22.0% (13)	5.1% (3)	1.7% (1)	2.37	59
Availability during office hours or via phone/email	20.3% (12)	<b>66.1%</b> <b>(39)</b>	11.9% (7)	1.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.95	59
Overall quality of tutorials	1.7% (1)	39.0% (23)	<b>50.8%</b> <b>(30)</b>	8.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	2.66	59
Skipped questions							0

Note: 1=very poor, 2= poor, 3=fair 4=good, 5=excellent

Most tutors working at the main centre, Kathmandu, were highly experienced at teaching their subject of specialisation on conventional campuses, but they had relatively limited experience of tutoring in DE programmes. Tutors at local study/tutorial centres had relatively limited experience of teaching. Many students emphasised the need for experienced, qualified, well-trained and committed tutors at local tutorial centres, and mentioned that, if possible, tutors from CDET central office should be invited as visiting tutors during tutorial sessions. For example:

*I think tutors also need training on teaching and supporting distance learners.*

[Nirmal]

*They [tutors] are not well-trained and are not committed to their duties.*

[OQR]

*The study centre employs local tutors who are not always experienced and have no or limited experience in teaching distance students... Kathmandu centre has employed well-experienced and professional tutors. Some of them used to visit Pokhara centre*

*and deliver lecturers at the beginning, but later that practice was stopped...I am sure, if tutors are employed full time and provided regular training, they will be able to provide better help and support.*

[Dinesh]

Some students pointed out the need for conferences and workshops to share problems, ideas and their experiences of DL:

*I think the university should seek advice from tutors, students and subject experts to improve the course, keeping the learners in focus. The university can organise workshops or seminars where students, tutors and administrative staff share their experiences.*

[Mohan]

#### **6.6.3.2 Demotivating tutorials**

Although most students perceived the contact session tutorial as valuable to their learning, they complained about the tutorial sessions being ‘irritating’, ‘demotivating’ ‘tedious’, and ‘monotonous’. For example:

*Contact sessions are important opportunities to meet tutors face-to-face but the contact session tutorials are painfully long and I found them irritating at times. Therefore, even if I have queries and questions, sometimes I feel that I should not ask the tutors. I keep my eyes on my watch, and feel that I want to get out of the tutorials. Because of the long lectures and due to the lack of interaction opportunities, it is also difficult to understand what is explained during the tutorials... Therefore, I feel that learning materials should*



*be self-sufficient so that contact sessions time can be used to discuss and find solutions to issues and problems faced by students.*

[Sirjana]

Because of long contact session tutorials (starting at 7 am and lasting till 4 or 5 pm), Sirjana refrained from asking questions as doing so would make the duration of the session even longer. When asked why she found the tutorials ‘irritating’, she indicated that the tutors did not employ varieties of instructional methods. Students said that tutors did not use varieties of teaching methods, and lecturing was the predominant method of instructional delivery. As a result, tutorials were demotivating and monotonous. There was almost no use of multimedia and ICT to support the instructional process. For example:

*Because of the over reliance on lecturing, I found the tutorials demotivating. I think about my job, family and other problems so my mind easily drifts away from the tutorials at the session... I know tutors are experienced, but they should also think about whether or not lecturing is helping students... I am not saying that contact sessions are not useful but that they are poorly organised and managed.*

[Sujan]

Some student expressed that they found it difficult to concentrate and keep focused on the tutorials:

*Basically, we just had to listen to tedious lectures and I used to get confused. Probably my brain is not accustomed to receiving such a huge amount of information transmitted at this age. It is our compulsion, and we [students] are forced by our motivation to study the course. I could not always concentrate on the tutorials...I found the lectures*

*very hard to follow as I did not come from a teaching background; it was very hard for me to understand the jargon and the discourse of the teaching field.*

[Rabindra]

*Tutors deliver monotonous lectures, and I used to forget what was actually said. I could hardly cope with such lectures. Tutors were more concerned with completing their tasks rather than helping students understand ideas and concepts.*

[Mohan]

I noticed that tutors relied heavily on lecturing, focused on transmitting content knowledge to students and emphasised content-oriented pedagogy. The existing educational context appeared to be one of causes for favouring tutor-centred and content-oriented pedagogy. For example, tutors at CDET were also engaged in teaching face-to-face mode, but rarely received training on tutoring and supporting distance students.

As stated earlier, career development or promotion prospects were the most frequently mentioned driving forces behind the choice of the course. Therefore, although most students had not been on a full-time course for over a decade, I discovered that that these adult learners had a strong sense of motivation to complete the course. Nevertheless, not all complaints were related to the methods of instruction and for some students tutorial issues were related to the lack of adequate opportunity for interaction with tutors.

#### **6.6.3.3 Lack of interaction opportunities**

As discussed previously, many scholars have argued that the role of interaction is critical in DE and advocated that DE institutions should provide a range of interaction opportunities to students in order to make DL more meaningful and effective, to enhance their educational

experiences, and to improve learning outcomes (Hillman et al., 1994; Holmberg, 1995; Moore and Kearsley, 1996). Students at CDET were concerned that they were rarely provided with opportunities to involve in two-way communication, i.e. to engage in discussion with tutors or with fellow learners.

*Contact sessions provide chances to meet tutors physically but they [students] rarely get opportunities to discuss their issues and problems... Therefore, I feel that study materials should be self-sufficient so that contact sessions time can be used to discuss and find solutions to academic issues and other problems faced by students.*

[Sirjana]

This quote is exemplary of concerns voiced by many students and while observing the contact session tutorials at study centres, I also noticed that tutors rarely provided time for interaction and discussion but they were mostly concerned with undertaking their routine tasks of tutoring 3-4 units and giving assignments or homework. It seemed that students and tutors would be able to make more effective use of face-to-face sessions provided that more interactive, learner-friendly, self-contained and comprehensive study materials were made available to students as this might help reduce the teaching load and release tutors' time so that they could engage with students with issues to discuss.. Some students suggested that allocating time after lunch break for discussing students' problems and issues may be fruitful and further help reduce monotony and boredom in the tutorial sessions. For example:

*Contact sessions provided some opportunities for us to communicate our learning needs and problems with the tutors. I think that it would be better if time before the lunch break is given to tutorials/lectures, and time after the break could be used to discuss issues and problems, and find answers to students' queries...This may help reduce passivity and refresh students.*

And:

*I think contact sessions should focus on students' problems, and provide guidance [to students] on how to proceed further, and they [tutors] should concentrate on how to make the sessions enjoyable, sustain students' motivation by encouraging them to engage in discussion and interaction and help students enhance their learning.*

[Sujan]

#### **6.6.3.4 Inadequate, irregular, uncertain contact sessions**

As highlighted in the Chapter Two, political Banda and unrests have become a part of people's day-to-day lives in Nepal. Educational institutions are often affected and such activities often lead to universities and colleges shutting down for up to 2-3 weeks.

*I am disappointed with the fact that the way contact sessions were conducted, help and support provided, and the functioning of the organisation and its management, did not live up to my expectations. For example, contact sessions were not always conducted on time, or even cancelled, and tutors and other support staff were not available when I needed help and guidance with administrative and academic aspects.*

[Suresh]

CDET authorities state that once pre-scheduled tutorials are cancelled or postponed, it becomes very difficult to rearrange them because of the problems of finding appropriate dates that suit both students and tutors as both groups are involved in full-time jobs elsewhere. Some students pointed out the necessity of frequent contact sessions to ensure regular contact with tutors and support staff:

*But I think contact session should be organised at least every two months or it should be increased to four or five days to allow students to discuss their problems. I am sure the university will reflect on its experiences and try to improve the programme quality. All human beings learn from experience.*

[Sirjana]

*As the contact session is the only place to get help and support, I think that there should be at least one session every month so that students get advice regularly about their problems and issues.*

[Mohan]

#### **6.6.3.5 Monitoring of study centre activities**

Since contact sessions were either cancelled or not conducted at all, students said that the central university and CDET should regularly monitor all the local tutorial centres and their activities in order to ensure the overall quality of the programme, efficiency of the administration and management, quality of tutorials and adequacy of support services. For example:

*The University should regularly monitor all regional centres and their activities. As far I am aware, no authorities from the university came to monitor contact sessions.*

[Dinesh]

*BirMet should improve its management and monitoring part... but at the moment it seems that all actions and reactions from or to the university have been driven by individual interests rather than for the benefits to the institutions.*

[Rabindra]

#### 6.6.4 Access to and availability support staff

Almost all tutors at CDET regional or local study centres were employed on part-time, or temporary contracts, and they worked full-time either at constituent campuses owned by TU or at other private colleges. Students said that it was not always possible to access academic and other support staff outside contact session tutorials. CDET tutorial centres had appointed resource persons, and mobile phone numbers of tutors and support staff were given out to provide continuing academic help and support to students. However, there seemed to be a gap between the rhetoric and reality, and policy and practice. Students considered that they needed easy access to tutors and support staff for receiving administrative and academic help even outside the contact sessions:

*It is often impossible to meet member of staff at the CDET centre apart from contact session times. ... I work full time and tutors have also involvement in 2/3 institutions, they are helpful but busy from morning to evening. It is very hard to find the right time to call them.*

[Nirmal]

*It was hard to meet them besides contact sessions periods... there is no regular full-time staff at the local centre except the centre coordinator.... When I encountered problems while studying the materials, I desperately wanted to contact my tutors for help and guidance, but tutors were either busy or not accessible. I also wanted help when writing my assignments but unfortunately immediate help was not available. It was only co-ordinator Sir who is available to support as the tutorial centre is located in his house where he lives. He is a co-ordinator but not a tutor, and will not always be able to provide academic support. There were no support staffs at the centre. It was very frustrating.*

[Dinesh]

### 6.6.5 Time and other issues for contacting tutors

Students expressed their frustration and disappointment because of the lack of access to, and availability of, tutors and other support staff when they required immediate help and support in their studies. Tutors were busy or unavailable and often it was very difficult to find suitable time to contact them. For example:

*We can phone tutors but only in the evenings as they are busy in other colleges during the morning and throughout the day. It is not always practicable to call in the evening, and I myself will be busy with my family.*

[Sujan]

*I was very disappointed and felt that I was ignored most of the time. It was difficult to find suitable time to contact tutors outside the contact session period. Tutors were very busy and rarely provided time for me when I needed help and guidance on my studies. Mobile phones were used but mainly for receiving updates about contact session changes or viva dates...Mobile phones are very useful but tutors are very busy most of the time.*

[Mohan]

*We do not always have direct contact with tutors. It is not always possible and practical to contact them as they teach full-time at other institutions. I try to call them but due to poor mobile network coverage, we often receive the message: 'Sorry the number you dialled cannot be reached at the moment. Please try again later'. Sometime tutors do not answer the calls.*

[Shyam]

*I have not used a mobile phone to contact tutors but I have used email particularly when I needed some guidelines with my assignment. However as tutors are busy and because of the lack of a regular electricity supply, it took weeks to get replies.*

[Sirjana]

Students and tutors reported that mobile phones were used to receive news about administrative issues. However, due to practical (e.g., employment status) and technical reasons (e.g. mobile coverage, lack of access to email or lack of regular electricity supply), students, tutors and support staff were not able to make effective use of mobile phones and email/internet. During my fieldwork, I also experienced a certain feeling of isolation as it was so difficult to find a way of using working e-mail to contact my supervisors. Some students on the course also reported that they felt isolated and suggested that adequate and efficient student support services is essential to minimise the feeling of frustration and isolation in students. For example:

*At time I felt that I was isolated because I could not contact tutors easily and there were no other persons to contact for immediate help and support. I had to wait for 2-3 months for contact session to get support, and even in contact session it was difficult to get time from tutors.*

[OQR]

*I do not think students receive adequate support, beside the contact sessions...I do have email access at my office, but not all tutors have access to emails. If internet/email or chat can be used, it would be easier for us to receive support from the centre and tutors. In my opinion, timely support and counselling services help to minimise the feeling of*



*frustration and isolation, encountered while studying through distance mode, and in sustaining motivation.*

[Sujan]

#### **6.6.6 Need for alternative form of support**

Since students are away from their tutors, fellow students and the DE institutions most of the time, apart from academic and administrative support, scholars have argued for the need of social support for distance learners (Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap, 2003; McIsaac and Gunawardena, 2000) which may include forming learning circles, the formation of learning communities, sharing experiences and resources and developing a feeling of belonging to a community. In Chapter Three, I presented various arguments put forwarded by many researchers in support of learning communities, or communities of prospective teachers. However, during my field work, I did not find any formal community of practice, or pre-service teachers' community at CDET. I did discover, however, that some students had formed what they call a 'study group' or 'informal support network' to share problems, discuss ideas, and share resources. Students outside the main centre, particularly, explained that since the local tutorial centres were poor in terms of resources, and lacked experienced and expert tutors, and that the tutors and experts in the main centre were responsible for devising examination questions and marking the final written examination papers, they needed to create a support network with students in Kathmandu to share resources, learning materials and tutors' notes and hand-outs. For example:

*I share my problems with my friends. We have a small group where we share our experiences and study materials as well...I find it quite useful. Some of the group members work in my office so we meet each other every day during lunch time. I also share ideas using my mobile phone.*

*I also used to receive materials from my friends in the Kathmandu centre. In terms of sharing ideas and resources, it would have been very useful if students themselves were not very busy.*

[Dinesh]

*We used to share the materials we had collected, and study on our free time. We had a small group of officers, so we used to discuss issues and problems with each other. We used to share learning materials. We basically learned from sharing problems, issues, and ideas in the group.*

[Rabindra]

*We had a group of four students who worked collaboratively. We used to collect materials from Kathmandu and share ideas. I found discussions with fellow colleagues very useful. We used to divide chapters among us, and share our understandings of them.*

[Mohan]

Such an informal study support group is often encouraged at the OUUK. For example, while undertaking MRes, students used to be invited by tutors to a local pub, which I found quite useful in terms of getting to know fellow students, and share perspectives and experiences. With the increasing growth of social networking sites in recent times, formation of such groups is possible on the web forum or using Facebook.

I also experienced that contact sessions were never monitored by the university officers but on a few occasions an administrative staff member from CDET travelled with me to inspect the

contact session activities. Local study centre co-ordinators, tutors and students told me that in the past few years CDET authorities have not monitored the local centre activities on a regular basis. I explore the reasons behind the poor monitoring mechanism of the university in the next chapter.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the students' experiences of the distance B.Ed. course at CDET. I explored the aspects of the programme that students liked and disliked, and described the difficulties experienced by the students. Students were concerned about several issues such as inadequate infrastructure and learning resources, weak administration and management, difficulty in accessing tutors, lack of appropriate feedback on assignments, inadequacy of student support services, lack of adequate academic and support staff, poor quality of tutorials and monotonous contact sessions, and a lack of experienced and well-qualified tutors, among others. Students provided many suggestions on how to improve the programme quality. For example, they suggested that CDET and its centres should ensure efficient administrative services; improve its educational infrastructure and learning facilities; use new technologies to enhance student educational experiences; encourage tutors to provide prompt and timely feedback; use varieties of assessment methods to assess students' learning; ensure adequate and efficient student support services; provide training to tutors and other support staff; rethink course delivery methods; ensure an adequate number of organisational staff; provide sufficient student-tutor and student-student interaction opportunities; develop a mechanism for systematic monitoring and periodically review its programme to ensure its quality and standards; and encourage research. The next chapter explores the perspectives and experiences of tutors/founder members about the B.Ed. programme.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: TUTORS' EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

## 7.1 Introduction

In chapter seven, I presented the views and experiences of the students regarding the distance B.Ed. course at CDET. In this chapter, I investigate the tutors'/founder members' perspectives on the distance education experiences, and seek answer to the third sub-research question:

*SRQ 3: What are the experiences and views of the tutors regarding educational infrastructure and learning resources, administration and management of the programme, contact session tutorials and student support, and staff development and training opportunities?*

During my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with four tutors/founder members (see Appendix V for their profiles) of CDET, and also engaged in informal talks with tutors and CDET local centre co-ordinators. Information provided by them varied significantly depending on their roles and responsibilities at CDET and its local study centres. For example, the interviewees Sudip and Netra served as course materials writers, tutors, founder members, and support staff, and therefore, they shared their points of view as tutors and administrative members, and sometimes as programme planners and developers. Tutor Ramesh was also engaged in multiple roles in that he was involved in writing self-study materials for English and teaching English subjects, while Binod was involved in tutoring Health and Population. All the interviewees were serving part-time at CDET and its local study centres but were employed as full-time lecturers at various campuses under the Tribhuvan University (TU).

Next, using the new conceptual framework developed in Chapter Three, I present the key themes which emerged from the tutors' interviews in the sections below.

## 7.2 Rationales for participating in DE

I asked interviewees about the reasons and motivation for becoming involved in the distance B.Ed. course. Tutors stated that they were interested in DE because of the flexibility of the course and it required less time commitment. The course also provided them with opportunities to generate extra income and obtain tutoring experiences in DE. For example:

*The main reason is that I do not have to commit much time for the course, and I can teach at other colleges at the same time. It is because contact sessions are arranged mostly during the weekends or public holidays with about a 2-3 months gap in between them.*

[Local tutor: Ramesh]

*I wanted to use my free time to earn extra income and at the same time to gain tutoring experiences in the distance programme, which I believe will also help my career development.*

[Local tutor: Binod]

Similarly, the four tutors in their questionnaire responses reported that they were motivated in tutoring the course because of its flexibility in terms of time commitment compared to campus-based full-time courses, and in gaining tutoring experiences, reported as significant by two respondents. The findings from interviews and questionnaire responses are in line with the results reported by previous studies. For example, while workload and increased time commitment was reported as a major inhibitor to faculty involvement in DE (Schifter, 2000), some motivating factors included the possibility of generating additional income, flexible scheduling, opportunity to experiment with new pedagogy, the opportunity to use technology, the opportunity to share knowledge with others, their career development/advancement, and

the opportunity to gain teaching experience (Crosby and Schnitzer, 2003; Green et al., 2009). However, some interviewees provided different rationales for their participation in the course, and they seemed to reiterate a philosophical and rhetorical stance. For example:

*In the Ninth Five-year National Plan of Nepal [1997-2002], the Nepal government articulated a vision to establish an Open University...So we wanted to bring educational opportunities to those individuals who live in isolated rural areas, and are not able to physically attend courses on campus for a variety of reasons or any other previously unreached population. Distance learning courses are also believed to be convenient for full-time workers, in the sense that it offers flexibility, and helps overcome the barrier of time and place. Overall, we wanted to bring educational opportunities to students' homes... Our goal is also to provide opportunities for people to upgrade their qualification or for working people to acquire advanced knowledge and skills through flexible means.*

[Tutor/Founder: Sudip]

*We introduced this distance B.Ed. programme to create opportunities and to provide easy-access quality education to those prospective teachers, or in-service teachers, who cannot attend face-to-face classes at universities, but are willing to enter the teaching profession or upgrade their qualifications. However, currently the impact of the programme is not only limited to prospective teachers, but it has been popular among civil servants working in various government sectors, or ministry offices, as the qualification provided by BIrMet has been recognised by the Public Service Commission.*

[Tutor/Founder: Netra]

In fact, as discussed in Chapter Three, one of the key rationales for using the distance mode is that such provision has the potential to widen access to education by removing barriers and to provide quality education and training at affordable cost. The previous chapter also reported that most of the students were taking the B.Ed. course as a means to their job promotions rather than genuinely doing the course for acquiring teaching qualifications, or to deepen their understanding and knowledge of teaching. For that reason, most students considered the distance B.Ed. course relevant and effective as they believed that the qualification would help in supporting their job promotion and pay rise.

### **7.3 Tutoring in distance education**

All tutors at CDET and its local study centres reported that they held qualifications and had significant experiences of teaching in traditional face-to-face contexts but they had no qualifications for tutoring distance learners. In this context, I asked about the differences they had identified in their roles as distance tutors. One tutor identified the use of communication technology to support learning as an important difference:

*I have not found significant differences between teaching face-to-face students and distance learners... The only difference, however, I notice was that students in conventional face-to-face contexts mode do not ask questions using emails, text messaging or phone. A few students have asked me questions via emails, and some students even call me if they need help and support in their studies or assignments... I have also replied to students' queries which require very short response via sms, such as the subject or chapters of a subject I will be tutoring on a certain contact session day, time of tutorials etc.*

[Ramesh]

Another tutor pointed out that, despite the high level of motivation, some students desired more support and timely feedback when they were unable to comprehend study materials, or experienced loneliness.

*What I noticed at CDET is we have adult and highly motivated learners. However, students come from different backgrounds and prior knowledge, and often students express that they found it difficult to understand Self-Study-Materials, and during the contact sessions, they request us to provide detailed explanations of key concepts, which is not always possible. Additionally, as opposed to traditional classroom students, due to the lack of regular contact with tutors and other staff, some students, have told me that they felt isolated, and requested more time and support from tutors. They also wanted timely feedback on their assignments.*

[Binod]

The feelings of loneliness and disconnectedness (Rovai, 2002), transactional distance (Moore, 2007), lack of social interaction and organisational support (Hartley et al., 2001; Park and Choi, 2009; Nichols, 2010) are reported as factors that lead to student attrition in DE courses (Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Park et al., 2011). Based on the tutors' responses, it appeared that students expected tutors to fulfil cognitive and affective functions of student support (Tait, 2000) and to minimise transnational distance and students' feelings of isolation and frustration through enhanced interaction and collaboration (Moore, 2007; Kennedy and Duffy, 2004). Students at CDET seemed to have considered the roles and responsibilities of tutors extending to offering enhanced guidance, support, feedback, encouragement and motivation (McPherson and Nunes, 2004; Tait, 2004; Lentell, 2003). However, although tutors may have been equipped with qualities, competencies and skills required for operating in DE contexts (e.g., Murphy et al., 2010; Shelley et al., 2006; Mishra, 2005), which may be a topic of further research, for various



reasons such as their part-time status, it was not always possible for them to perform these multiple roles and responsibilities in an effective manner. Therefore, tutoring in DE can be a demanding task particularly in a development context which lacks adequate infrastructure, logistics, educational technology and student support mechanisms. I will explore this issue further in the next chapter.

## **7.4 Educational infrastructure and learning resources**

As discussed in the previous chapter, students were critical of the existing state of infrastructure and learning facilities CDET and its local study centre. During my fieldwork, I observed that physical infrastructure was poor, library facilities were almost non-existent, and access to and the use of ICT was limited. Only the CDET centre in Kathmandu had some computers which were only used for administrative purposes.

### **7.4.1 Inadequate physical and technological infrastructure**

The tutors were aware of the fact that CDET and its local centres were operating with poor educational infrastructure. Administrative and tutorial activities in Butwal and Pokhara centres were conducted from the centre coordinators' residence while Nuwakot centre made use of a public school classroom for the tutorials.

*We have very poor physical infrastructure such as college buildings, classrooms, and no library facilities. Computer and internet, and library facilities are not available in this centre. Our classrooms and college building needs improvement. Students sometimes use mobile phones to contact us. As I do not have internet access at home, I cannot use emails. Cybercafes could be used to exchange emails between tutors and students but because of Banda, lack of regular power supply, my limited technical skills or due to my busy time schedule, it is not possible for me to make use of such technology.*

As discussed in Chapter Three, scholars (e.g., Keegan, 1996; Moore, 2007; Peters, 1993) advocate that adequate physical infrastructure and technological infrastructure are pre-requisites for DE, and importantly the use of ICT is essential to enhance interactions among learners, with their tutors, and with the DE institution. Some tutors also considered the use of ICT is important in DE system, but they highlighted practical concerns regarding the use of new communication technologies.

*Our students are not aware of the importance of e-learning. They do not use e-mail and internet. In our calculation about 90% of our students have access to email and the internet as they work in government offices...I also feel that all the students the course should receive ICT training before they attend the first contact session.*

[Netra]

*We need to use modern communication technology but no such facilities are available in this centre, even where there is an access to such facilities, we cannot use them because of 'Load Shedding'.*

[Local tutor: Suraj via OQR]

My observation was that most tutors did not have access to the internet in their homes, and some did not have email addresses. Researchers have reported that to enhance student-student, student-tutor, and tutor-tutor interaction, the use of synchronous ICT facilities such as the use of the telephone, especially mobile phone, is of paramount importance in DE in a developing country like Uganda (Nankanja and Bisaso, 2011). As discussed in the previous chapter, and noted by one of the tutors, the use of ICT, particularly mobile phone and SMS was nascent at CDET, but on a smaller scale as the use of mobile phones was curtailed by the fact that tutors

and students were busy and it was difficult for them to find a convenient time to contact each other. However, the users of mobile phones are rapidly growing in Nepal<sup>24</sup>, and all students and tutors possessed mobile phones. Although sometimes the mobile network signals are not so good due to power cuts and poor network coverage, the growth in the use of mobiles is likely to increase the use of SMS. As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of mobile phones has great potential in supporting DE, provided that CDET and its local centre can afford full-time trained staff to provide support in using the telephone or mobile devices.

The founder members, and tutors, provided two main barriers to appropriate infrastructure development, namely provision of inadequate financial resources and the lack of a favourable political environment for investment.

#### **7.4.2 Inadequate financial resources**

Some staff members and tutors reported that the key barrier to the infrastructure and learning facilities is the lack of financial resources. For example:

*The main issues are poor economic and financial aspects. We were financially limited when we launched this programme. After working hard for years, we have been able to manage the educational resources and materials, though not adequately yet. We recognise that there should have been a reference library and plenty of books and learning resources at CDET centres... We charge about 15900 [approx. £150] rupees*

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<sup>24</sup> According to the 'Management System Report 2012, Issue 37, Vol. 85' published by Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA), the number of cell phone users in Nepal reached 13.35 million in December 2011, meaning one in two Nepalese have access to mobile phone.

*and out of which 3500 goes to BirMet. We also provide Self-Learning Materials free of cost. We have to pay for tutors, staff, and resource persons.*

[Netra]

*I understand that this CDET centre has a poor infrastructure and learning environment, and no ICT and library facilities. However, I am aware that student fees are the sole source of income for this centre, and in this centre, we have only 22 students this year. The centre also needs to pay rents. Therefore, the centre has not been able to invest more on educational infrastructure facilities, communication technologies and library facilities.*

[Binod]

#### **7.4.3 Lack of conducive political environment for capital-investment**

Another tutor and member of staff argued that another barrier for impeding the infrastructure development was the adverse political environment for capital-investment. He acknowledged that heavy investment was required, but argued that constant political instability was not only creating confusion about substantial capital investment but also threatening the sustainability of the B.Ed. programme.

*Considerable investment is required to strengthen, expand and modernise our educational infrastructure, such as physical infrastructure, modern technology, library facilities and human resources... But political instability is a problem. For example, one major political party is against the privatisation of education, and so because of financial insecurity and doubts about the sustainability of private educational institutions, we are in a constant dilemma about increasing investment. Some political parties and other groups even ask for 'donations'.*

In Chapter Two, I highlighted that the various political and non-political groups' make requests for 'a contribution' or 'forced donations' from educational institutions to support their activities. Therefore, data here also show that CDET founder members were concerned about the security of their investments and the sustainability of the programme.

## **7.5 The university and CDET management and administration**

As discussed in the previous chapter, arguing that CEDT/BirMet administration and management system was 'weak', 'unresponsive', 'uncooperative', and 'corrupt', students stressed the need to improve administrative management of the university, CDET and local study centres. CDET authorities and local centre coordinators and tutors were also aware of issues such as the lack of appropriate scheduling of examinations and delays in the publication of results, poor record keeping systems, inadequate administrative staff, poor coordination and collaboration between CDET and university, and absence of proper monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms (see 7.7.4 below).

It seemed that lack of professionalism and integrity, management incompetence, lack of resources and trained staffing and lack of institutional monitoring are some of the causes behind the poor management and examination delays at BirMet. UNESCO (2007) points out that improving skills in management, establishing clear norms and transparent procedures, regular

institutional monitoring and audits are some of the basic requirements for reducing corruption<sup>25</sup> in education.

### 7.5.1 Academic calendar issues

CDET and local authorities and tutors were critical about the lack of commitment from the university to follow its academic calendar, about the irregular scheduling of examination, and the delays in conducting viva and publishing examination results on time. For example, some tutors expressed their concerns about the issue as:

*The University has not followed its academic calendar, and exam results are not always published quickly enough. For example, students from the previous academic year are still waiting for their practicum viva. They ask us when their viva is going to be held and results published, some even express their anger but we cannot provide answers to these issues. The decision about conducting viva and publishing examination results is even beyond the control of CDET because the BirMet management is responsible for that.*

[Binod]

*In my 18 years teaching career, I had never experienced a situation in which a university is unable to appoint an external examiner for the viva up to a year after a course has finished.*

[Ramesh]

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<sup>25</sup> According to UNESCO (2007, p. 29), corruption refers to ‘the systematic use of public office for private benefit’.

Another tutor pointed out that the university had ignored the directive of the Ministry of Education.

*Students from last year have been waiting for their practicum viva. The MoE and District Education Office has directed the university to conduct the viva soon, yet the university has not followed the instruction. Students have become the victim of the carelessness of the university.*

[Sudip]

One of the senior tutors pointed out that despite complying with all the assessment procedures, the university administration delayed practicum viva and examination results. Therefore, because of the irresponsible behaviour of the university, students had to suffer.

*Students have submitted all their work and we have kept all the records. We have made sure that students meet all the requirements and assessment criteria. We have even sent the names of head teachers where students worked, so that BirMet can scrutinize what students did. Despite our requests, and students' too, the university has not shown any interest in conducting the viva.*

[Netra]

Therefore, as discussed in the section below, apart from committed administrative leadership and responsive administration, good communication and consistency of support from the university were considered as key success factors by CDET founder members and administrative coordinators, for the effective delivery, implementation and sustainability of the distance B.Ed. programme.

### 7.5.2 Poor coordination, cooperation and communication

Tutors and administrators, like students, highlighted the need for a good, effective, system of communication between students, CDET and the university, and strong support from the university leadership. It was not only CDET authorities in Kathmandu but local study centre authorities who claimed that the university was uncooperative and unresponsive. The Pokhara centre co-ordinator, who had faced warnings from the students about the possible closure of the study centre, stated that, in future, he was thinking of providing courses affiliated to international universities rather than from BirMet.

*The university has not been co-operative, and responsible, and I have not received sufficient professional and administrative support from the university leadership. Although the centre is responsible for most administrative and tutorial activities, it is the responsibility of the university to run its programme according to the calendar provided to us. I rang university authorities many times but they tend to turn deaf ears to our problems.*

[Lal, Pokhara centre co-ordinator: based on 'Chiya-Gaff']

Another senior staff member also emphasized that proper cooperation and communication is critical for the smooth functioning of the university, college and local study centres.

*I feel that there should be good cooperation and regular communication between the university and college academic and administrative staff to improve the functioning of the university and the college... The university writes about four letters to the college in a year, one about student registration, another about the exam registration form, and another about exam results. The university very rarely communicates, at other times, with the college.*



During informal talks with senior CDET authorities, reference had also been made to corruption, malpractice, and lack of transparency in the use of resources at the University, which these officials considered as the reasons for the lack of prompt support from the university. One of the tutors, who was critical about the conflict between the university and CDET, emphasised the need for collaborative consultation between the CDET centres and the University in order to mitigate obstacles and manage conflict effectively.

*The university, CDET and its centres should work more collaboratively... If there are any misunderstandings between the college and the university administrative authorities, they should find a solution to their problems through talks. Students should not become victims of the internal conflict between the university and the college. I feel that there is also a lack of proper coordination between the CDET main centre and its local officers. Therefore, there seem to be a need to regularly share information and provide coordinated administrative support to tutors and students.*

[Ramesh]

During my fieldwork, the CDET founder members and centre coordinators frequently reported to me that the university senior officers were reluctant to answer their phone calls, and that conflict resolution depended on the willingness of the BirMet administration to realise its responsibilities and restore its commitment to fulfil them.

Scholars argue that an effective system of communication and good collaboration between university administrative staff, teaching staff, technical support staff, librarians and students, is an important prerequisite for the success of DE institutions (Dhanarajan, 1996; Kennedy and Duffy, 2004). Nevertheless, on the one hand, it seemed crucial to increase communication and

collaboration between CDET and local authorities, tutors, students and the university to ensure administrative efficiency, sense of responsibility and commitment, and consistency of support. Yet, on the other hand, poor electricity supply, lack of ICT facilities, unreliable postal services and transportation services inhibited regular communication and interaction. As described in Chapter Two, in a country where day-to-day life is frequently crippled by Banda and strikes, the university may not always be physically accessible to students, tutors and administrators. Therefore, some of the factors that hamper the administrative efficiency of the university and CDET centres appear to be the lack of proper communication infrastructure, poor and unreliable physical infrastructure facilities, lack of committed administrative leadership, and lack of proper coordination among CDET and the University.

### **7.5.3 Need for adequate organisational staffing**

All CDET local centres suffered from an acute shortage of adequate and skilled administrative staff. The Kathmandu centre employed four full-time administrative staff as student enrolment in the centre was high (290 students in the academic year 2009/10), compared to other local centres which enrolled 22 students on average. As far as CDET local study centres were concerned, besides contact session tutorials, administrative staff and centre coordinators were almost inaccessible in local offices as they were committed to teaching full-time in other institutions.

*We do not have full-time administrative and other support staff in our centre. Mostly students contact me for administrative and academic problems. When I am busy, tutors and our resource person provide administrative and academic support. But I have noticed that part-time tutors and the resource person feel reluctant to be active. Because of financial constraints, the centre has not been able to recruit full-time administrative and academic staff.*

For Anjan, inadequate finance was the important barrier to staff development and understaffing. Another tutor commented that tutors' part-time status has affected the way they provide time and support to students.

*Although students are told that they can contact the centre coordinator about administrative issues, and tutors and the resource person for academic support, they cannot always get immediate assistance from us. I understand the need for a local support system for students, but tutors and support staff are not always available to help students. As a part-time tutor, I also cannot increase my time commitment, efforts and workload in the programme.*

[Binod]

*As I work part-time I cannot take full responsibility and I can rarely provide support outside contact session time. So, more full-time tutors should be appointed in order to provide academic support to students.*

[Ramesh]

All CDET local centres were operating in similar circumstances and lacked adequate organisational staffing. As a result, these centres were not able to deliver proper administrative and academic support services at local level. The absence of financial incentives and other rewards; poor institutional support; the lack of recognition for the time and efforts DE demands; and the lack of experience of tutoring have been reported in previous studies as inhibiting factors affecting staff and tutors' commitment in DE programmes (Schifter, 2000; Green et al., 2009).

#### 7.5.4 Organisational structure, programme ownership and accountability

Some tutors stated that the university should ensure appropriate institutional or organisational structure. Others pointed out that, for sustainability and for ensuring the quality of the B.Ed. programme, the university should take ownership of its programme and demonstrate its commitment to attaining its goals and objectives.

*The university also lacks enough administrative members, and is not concerned about developing the expertise and human resources needed to implement the programme effectively. For example, the university has only one record keeping section, yet it has so many educational programmes... Either they should establish the department of education within the university and a programme monitoring board, or they should trust CDET's activities.*

[Sudip]

Another CDET founder member emphasized that for the sustainability of the programme, the university should articulate a clear vision, take ownership of the programme and demonstrate its continued commitment to providing quality education through distance mode.

*Its [B.Ed. programme] sustainability depends on the university's vision. If the university does not feel that it has a duty and responsibility to strengthen its programme, if the university does not support its own programme, then we cannot invest more on this programme as one day it may collapse... Sometimes we wonder whether the University has forgotten the fact that this is its own programme.*

[Netra]

## 7.6 Contact session tutorials

Apart from the use of Self-Learning-Materials, various forms of learner support were integrated into the design of the programme such as on-campus face-to-face induction sessions and tutorials, and provision of local centre coordinators and resource persons. One of the tutors reported that the on-campus sessions were intended to help manage their study and support their learning.

*To provide further support or identify the issues and problems of students, we made contact sessions mandatory so that students can discuss their problems during that time...use orientation session to provide students information about the nature of the course, homework and assignments, time management and study skills, to avoid frustration.*

[Sudip]

Face-to-face sessions and on-site support from study centre facilitators, tutors, and resource persons are important for distance learners. Scholars have conceptualised various roles of the study centres' such as providing individual study opportunities at appropriate times, offering access to library and technology facilities; creating opportunities to meet administrative staff, tutors and fellow students; providing guidance, counselling and tutoring support, and helping to take examinations at local level (Mills, 1996), but for varieties of reasons CDET and its local study centres were not able to provide all these services. For example, CDET centres lacked infrastructure, and human resources to deliver adequate student support services. Additionally, because of frequent Banda affecting travel, and for economic reasons, students demanded examination centres at local level but this was not possible for practical reasons. For example:

*Conducting of examination at local level has been problematic due to the provision of the university that there should be at least 100 students in an examination centre.*

[Netra]

### **7.6.1 Issues of interactivity during the tutorials**

As discussed in the previous chapter, most students were critical about contact sessions, however, saying that the contact sessions were long and demotivating, infrequent, poorly managed, and did not provide opportunities for interaction and discussion, and relied heavily on lecturing. Nonetheless, tutors reported that students were passive, and considered tutors as transmitters of knowledge rather than facilitators, which they considered needed to be changed.

*Students are reluctant to raise issues and discuss problems during the tutorials...On rare occasions, students ask questions but even then they want answers to the 'Practice Questions' given in the study materials...Only when I start asking some questions related to certain chapters/units they were assigned to prepare, do they start saying they did not understand this and that...We have problems changing the concept that tutors are knowledge transmitters, and students are passive receivers, or note takers.*

[Sudip]

As pointed in the previous chapter, perhaps because of the lack of adequate content coverage in the SLMs, students may have been tutorial-focused and note-takers. I noticed that both students and tutors appeared to be influenced by a 'traditional' approach to learning and teaching. It seems that one factor promoting such a traditional approach to learning is the assessment provision at CDET. Theoretical subjects rely on an end-of-course written examination. As a result students emphasise content absorption to pass the examination with good marks. Because of the examination oriented assessment system, students seem to have

taken a 'surface approach' (characterised by an intention to complete the learning tasks assignment) to learning as opposed to a 'deep approach' (characterised by an intention to understand) to learning (Bertram, 2003). Bertram (2003), while exploring students' experiences in South African teacher education programme, found that because of students' educational experiences they favoured a didactic approach and were used to being lectured.

Another tutor reported that due to a scarcity of instructional resources and ICT facilities, he had to overuse lecture methods, which affected two-way communication between the tutors and students.

*Even though this is a distance education programme, we normally teach in traditional ways for various reasons. For example, we do not have adequate resources and materials, and the college has not been able to use technology to support learning and teaching... Because of so many tasks, tutors have to finish during the contact sessions and in a limited time, so tutorials are mostly based on lecturing.*

[Ramesh]

Researchers have reported that the educational contexts, within which a DE system operates, affects students' expectations and learning styles (Fung and Carr, 2000). In this regard, Rennie and Mason (2007) point out that:

*the importance of the content prevails over the educational context, and learning styles are conditioned to perpetuate the role of passive learners rather than critical thinkers ...this is not just a problem of education in Nepal ... but to some extent this [content-oriented] approach has been accentuated by lack of resources. The student-centred pedagogy of much Western higher education depends on the availability of books, journals, libraries and online resources. These are very much more restricted in less*

*developed countries and consequently reliance on the teacher and the content knowledge of the expert is understandable.*

Nevertheless, although tutors were operating in a low resourced context, it is a part of their professional responsibilities to make students activate and engage in instructional activities. As discussed in Chapter Three, to maximise study pleasure and for successful DL, it is important to pay attention to the nature of interpersonal relations between tutors and learners, and encourage interaction between and amongst learners and their tutors (Holmberg, 2003, 2005).

Tutors seem to imply that interactivity was also affected by the fact that they needed to teach 3-4 units of the subject in a tutorial session as well as providing briefings for the next assignments. I noticed that rather than concentrating on key difficult areas, tutors seemed to spend time trying to cover all the units. Tutorials in the Kathmandu centre were crowded, and students rarely asked tutors questions. Even in other study centres, where numbers of students in the tutorial sessions were considerably lower, the dominant teaching method was lecturing and tutor-student interaction was limited, and student-student interaction was almost non-existent during these tutorials. On a few occasions, students requested that tutors clarified certain ideas and concepts given in the study materials, as they were not adequately explained and sufficiently covered by the SLMs (cf. Chapter Five). Therefore, face-to-face tutorials sessions were more like *tuition*<sup>26</sup> rather than *tutoring*<sup>27</sup> (Price et al., 2007). I also noticed that

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<sup>26</sup> The teaching of a syllabus of knowledge where instructional designers have the greatest influence on the nature of tutor-student interactions... a more objective, impersonal activity intended to meet the needs of a group, and involving interpretation and assessment of a subject.

<sup>27</sup> A more subjective and personal activity that intended to meet the needs of individuals, where the students themselves have the greatest influence on the nature of tutor-student interactions...more pastoral and interactive, involving supporting, counselling and mentoring students aimed at helping them grasp the big picture (Price et al, 2007, pp. 13-14)



due to the fact that assessments of theoretical subjects (a part from 20% internal assessment) was based on summative evaluation or end-of-year written examination, students preferred listening to tutors, appeared to be more examination-centric and looked for specific guidance and support for finding answers to the review questions given in the SLMs, or to the questions from past examination papers not covered by the SLMs. Additionally, it seems that a review of the student assessment system at CDET is essential. Use of a variety of assessment strategies would provide students opportunities to receive regular feedback on their understanding and progress, which in turn would reduce the workload for the end-of-year written examinations and encourage students to take a deep approach to learning.

#### **7.6.2 Issue of feedback and comments**

As discussed in Chapter Six, students expressed their concerns over the lack of or poor feedback on their assignments and were critical about the lack of transparency in the marking of their internal assessment. However, some tutors argued that students should take the initiative and submit the assignments on time for prompt feedback, while others accepted that the feedback mechanism was poor but rejected the criticism of a lack of transparency in internal assessment marking.

*Students are motivated, but they have 'tired-minds'... we need to push them all the time... As far as feedback and comments are concerned, it depends on both the tutor and students. If they submit their work on time, then they can receive timely feedback which will help improve their other assignments.*

[Sudip]

Another tutor said that because of the lack of time and a busy schedule, he only provided feedback when the students were desperate about it.

*I am a part-time tutor. I am mostly available during the contact session tutorials. As I am busy with other institutions, I cannot provide enough time for the students at this centre. While I correct errors on objective test items such as multiple choice questions, I do not provide detailed comments on subjective questions unless students makes a special request for feedback.*

[Binod]

This may suggest that giving regular feedback had not been a part of assessment marking procedures at CDET. Although time constraint was reported as one of the causes for this, it appeared that CDET had not provided tutors with adequate incentives and/or skills development and training opportunities to carry out their roles. Given the fact that CDET could not afford full-time tutors, the idea of “*correspondence tuition*”<sup>28</sup> Rumble (1997, p. 107) may be useful in this context, so that students get opportunities to learn from tutors’ feedback.

Another tutor mentioned that he provided timely feedback but refuted the allegations about the unfairness in marking.

*I provide timely feedback and comments on students’ work should indicate the range of marks they are going to get. As far as I am concerned, I believe that all students should be treated fairly, and I do not think that I am influenced by ‘halo effect’ or ‘impressionistic’ type of marking.*

[Ramesh]

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<sup>28</sup> In such provision distance learners submit their written assignments to tutors for marking and assessment, and marked assignments is returned to students with appropriate feedback and comments. Tutors get paid for every assignment marked.

I discovered that there was a need to review the student assessment system at BirMet by making use of a variety of assessment strategies and enabling tutors to carry out their roles so that the workload for the end-of-year written examinations is reduced, and that students receive regular feedback on their understanding and progress. However, one of the tutors pointed out that due to the lack of adequate organisational staffing to handle continuous assessment, end-of-year examinations were preferred

*We do not have enough staff to handle a semester system, and do not have any mechanism to control plagiarism. Therefore, we have emphasized the need for a formal final examination. We are talking with the university to review our programme, so possibly, when we next review the course, we will make some adjustment to include other assessment strategies.*

[Sudip]

### **7.6.3 Need for qualified tutors and support for tutors**

Apart from the impact of educational culture on students' and tutors' roles and expectations, the paucity of resources, and tutors' qualifications and training status also seem to have affected the use of teaching strategies, and quality of support provided to the students. For example, tutors in the Kathmandu centre were well-experienced in teaching face-to-face students while local study centres employed novice tutors who did not have much experience or knowledge of tutoring and supporting distance students. Therefore, local tutors emphasised the need for training and sharing knowledge:

*I have not done any training to teach distance students...CDET conducted workshops and provided one-day training to tutors teaching at regional centres last year, but there is no continuous professional development, or a faculty development programme at the*

*college. It would be good if the college or university could provide training on teaching learners on distance education programme, or organise workshops on ways of providing support to them as well as on writing study materials.*

[Ramesh]

Another tutor also stressed that CDET should conduct workshops in order share experiences, skills and knowledge for improving professional practice.

*I think the university or CDET should conduct refreshers training and workshops for tutors and other support staff so that we can not only identify common issues faced by students and local centres, but also share expertise and learn from each other.*

[Binod]

I found that local tutors were very interested in improving their tutoring skills and providing better support to students but poor infrastructure and instructional resources, limited time commitment, and lack of institutional support prevented them from pursuing their passions. Therefore, it is essential that the university and CDET should focus on capacity building, staff development and faculty support by establishing appropriate mechanisms for providing regular training and continuous support. One of the founder members reported that because of financial constraints the college could not provide regular training.

*We are a small institution so we cannot afford intensive training but we encourage tutors to organise or attend workshops and training.*

[Sudip]

Another founder member acknowledged the poor quality of tutors and tutorials at local study centres.

*Tutors outside Kathmandu are not well-trained, or they are not very active... We have also felt that the quality of tutorials and service provided outside Kathmandu might have been compromised. We also came to understand that some centres conducted just a day tutorial session, which students complained as being insufficient.*

[Netra]

During my fieldwork, I also noticed that due to Banda and strikes, some of the centres were not able to conduct tutorials as scheduled. Netra goes on to say that CDET was trying its best to ensure the quality of tutorials, and support, provided to students through regular monitoring of the study centres' activities.

*Last year, we found that in our absence, some of these centres did not conduct tutorials effectively, and did not provide proper guidance to students, so we closed down three study centres... we also need to train Resource Persons to provide better support and guidance at local level*

[Netra]

## **7.7 Factors contribution to distance education**

In order to address the challenges and problems encountered, and for the institutionalisation of DE system in Nepal, tutors/founder members and CDET local centre coordinators considered the importance of four key factors:

- a. Clear vision, policy and government support
- b. Strong political will and committed leadership
- c. Programme monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms
- d. Collaborative partnerships with established institutions

### 7.7.1 Clear government vision, policy and support

I mentioned in Chapter Two that the Nepalese government expressed a vision to establish an Open University a decade ago, but the government has not taken any initiatives to implement this. The infrastructure needed for DE system, curriculum materials and human resources development requires a heavy initial cost. Therefore, the tutors and founder members identified that a strong national strategy for implementation, and financial support from the government, is essential for a regulated and sustainable DE system in Nepal.

One of the tutors and founder members stressed that the roles of the private sector or private-public partnerships, should be made clear on policy level.

*There is still confusion about whether it is the government or private sector who should take the initiative in establishing, and expanding access to, education via alternative means. Either the government should take the initiative or they should devise rules and regulations to support private institutions in providing education through distance mode.*

[Sudip]

Another tutor also stated the necessity of clear policy and financial support from the government.

*We are facing problems because of the government's lack of vision on distance education, and due to the lack of clear distance education policy guiding higher education... High foundation cost is required to strengthen, expand and modernise our educational infrastructure, such as physical infrastructure, modern technology, library facilities and human resources... Only with government's support and investment, I think, such programme can be sustainable.*

Netra, further, emphasised the need to establish an appropriate mechanism to explore future prospects and the challenges of DE:

*To further develop and sustain distance education in Nepal, what I feel is that the government should establish a Distance Education Commission, similar to the Higher Education Commission, to address the issues of distance education system at national level.*

### **7.7.2 Strong political will and committed leadership**

Although the government outlined a vision for DE, due to the frequent changes in government and lack of committed political leadership, the government's vision is still confined to a policy document. Therefore, it was also suggested that political leadership should demonstrate a strong political commitment to implement and support the DE provision.

*I think most political leaderships, because of their vested interests, do things which serve their political or personal interests rather than the interest of the nation or the educational institutions. Therefore, there is a need for a genuine and committed political leadership to implement the distance education policy.*

[Binod]

### **7.7.3 Collaborative partnerships with established institutions**

Tutors and other staff members at CDET, and local study centres, frequently mentioned the lack of experience, resources and expertise. For example:

*In Nepal, we do not have long experience of delivering the distance education programme. We have taken advice from subject experts while revising the study*

*materials, but we do not have media and technical experts. We have yet to develop expertise and professionalism in distance education in Nepal.*

[Sudip]

Some tutors noted that collaboration and cooperation with established international DE institutions and sharing of resources, scholarship, and expertise would help strengthen and improve the DE practice in a developing country like Nepal.

*We should learn from international experience and practice as well. We need to bring knowledge about best practices of distance education into the country. We should arrange knowledge-exchange programmes, visit established distance institutions, to study and understand the methods in other countries.*

[Netra]

Another tutor expressed similar views:

*Due to financial constraints, lack of expertise, and resources, we had to rely on our experience of teaching at traditional universities. We were recently invited to take part in an international conference of distance education. I hope we can learn something from that and can use knowledge we receive to improve our practice.*

[Ramesh]

#### **7.7.4 Programme monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms**

Monitoring and evaluation may help determine, maintain, and improve the standards of DE programmes, curriculum and study materials, infrastructure and facilities, administration and management, human resources and staffing, tutorial and learning activities, student assessment, course delivery methods, student support services and financial management. The tutors and



founder members at CDET highlighted the need for a quality assurance and monitoring mechanism to scrutinize BirMet and its programme for quality standards.

*The problem with BirMet is that whenever some institute proposes a new educational programme, it provides affiliation to all just for the financial benefits. I think the University Grants Commission should control and restrict the university in granting affiliation to private institutes without first preparing human resources and other administrative and monitoring mechanisms.*

[Sudip]

*I do not think there is any monitoring mechanism at BirMet. But CDET organises meetings of tutors, the management body and other members of staff, where we discuss issues and problems, and try to address them...the university should be more accountable and responsible...to ensure administrative efficiency, and to maintain the standard of education provided.*

[Ramesh]

The CDET authorities and local centre coordinators, during my centre visits, reported that the programme was never reviewed. They considered that the university should conduct reviews and diagnostic self-assessments of the distance B.Ed. programme to determine its effectiveness. The University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) of higher education in Nepal, which aims to facilitate higher education programmes, institutions and universities to develop quality assurance mechanisms by providing formats for self-assessment, peer reviews and quality audits (UGC, 2012c). It seems clear from the UGC guidelines that BirMet is responsible for carrying out the internal

review or assessment of the programme and providing a report to the UGC but the university had not undertaken any initiatives to do this.

*The university has not shown any concern towards monitoring the programme. It has not shown any interest in revising/reviewing the programme.*

[Netra]

As pointed out by some founder members, the university appears to be more concerned with providing permission to private institutions to launch educational programmes, without undertaking institutional audits regarding their institutional capacity, organisational structure, infrastructure facilities, and human resources needed for the programmes' operation. During the fieldwork, I noticed that contact sessions at local study centres were not always monitored. The CDET did not have adequate qualified academic staff to do this. Therefore, it would be better if the university and CDET authorities worked collaboratively in order to establish systems for regular monitoring and to undertake internal self-study, or external reviews with the help of the UGC, and take appropriate action on the basis of the UGC's recommendations. Monitoring, follow-up and the quality review process can help obtain valuable information on programme functioning and quality. The University should therefore periodically review the DE programme in the light of feedback from students, tutors, administrators and other key players involved in the programme, and should undertake critical reflections on programme performance and progress.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analysed interviews with the four tutors, and talks with study centre co-ordinators. These revealed several factors which impede the effective delivery of the distance B.Ed. programme at CDET, including inadequate educational infrastructure and

communication facilities, and lack of adequate financial resources. Political instability, understaffing, poor administrative services and organisational structure were also seen as factors preventing the effective implementation of the programme.

The tutors and staff also pointed out that CDET/BirMet need to ensure committed professional educational leadership, effective and competent management, adequately trained tutors and staff, and dedicated student support services. They reported that clear government vision, policy and support; strong political will and leadership; collaborative partnership with established DE institutions; and regular monitoring and use of evaluation mechanisms would significantly contribute to the academic legitimacy of the distance teacher education programme in Nepal.

In the next chapter, I discuss my research in relation to major issues and concerns reported by tutors and students, regarding the distance teacher education programme, and identify factors that facilitate or hinder the growth and development of DE system in Nepal.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss some of the salient issues pertaining to the distance teacher preparation programme at CDET, operating under BirMet in Nepal. For this purpose, I outline that factors affecting the quality of the B.Ed. programme are of two broad categories: issues at institutional level, and issues at national level. I begin the discussion considering key factors at institutional level, and then I go on to consider those at national level. Based on the discussion, finally, I seek to answer my final sub-research question (SRQ):

*SRQ 4: What are the main factors that facilitate or hinder distance teacher education in Nepal?*

### 8.2 Institutional factors affecting distance education

It can be argued that DE in a development context cannot be fully understood without reference to the institutional characteristics and context. Similarly, performance and success of DE institutions appear to be closely linked to the interplay between various institutional factors. I discuss how these factors affect the DE programme in the sections below.

#### 8.2.1 Institutional mission and commitment

The data suggest that a need for institutional commitment, with a clearly defined vision and mission to develop clear strategic and implementation plans, and a will to achieve its objectives, is necessary for the success of the programme at CDET/BirMet. The success of a DE programme may also be determined by the extent to which the programme and strategic plans are aligned with institutional policy plan, vision and mission. Additionally, in order to ensure success, the institutions offering DE courses need to demonstrate sustained efforts

through plans for continuous improvement. To achieve programme objectives, DE institutions needs to ensure conducive institutional arrangements such as appropriate infrastructure and learning resources; an enabling learning environment; student support services and faculty/staff development and support system. DE providers should be committed to maintaining and improving the quality of their programmes through research and review.

Although CDET appeared to be committed in its mission goals of improving access to teacher education through distance mode, due to the lack of appropriate support from the BirMet, the college was not able to fully demonstrate its commitment to quality. As I pointed out in Chapters Six and Seven, students and tutors were critical about some aspects of the programme such as inadequate infrastructure and learning resources, poor learning environment, lack of committed educational leadership, and poor administrative and support services. Institutional planning was poor and management was incompetent. CDET endeavour was challenged by the severe lack of resources and most often issues revolved around the lack of funding, lack of support from the university and the government. Naidu (2006) notes that funding has a direct impact on the quality of DE programmes and the effectiveness of delivery of student support services. In this regard, Umar (2006, p. 83) argues that to maintain quality and standard of education programme, DE institutions require committed leadership and sufficient funding resources as well as decentralised organisational management:

*Commitment to quality assurance requires not only good leadership and adequate funding, but also a model of programme management that appropriately decentralises decision-making processes so that all the levels of staff feel that they are part of the processes to the extent that prompt action is taken to address any problem that may arise at any point in the system.*

Therefore, BirMet and CDET need to take appropriate action to show their commitment to delivering educational services of the highest quality possible, and to maintaining the quality of higher education and training programmes conducted through distance mode.

### **8.2.2 Infrastructure and resources**

As reported in Chapter Six and Seven, CDET and its local study centres were operating with limited physical, technological, human and financial resources. Students, tutors, and administrators recognised these as major challenges hindering the growth and quality of the distance teacher education programme. For example, none of the CDET centres had its own property, physical space was congested, and tutorial rooms were small. Library, learning resources, and ICT facilities were non-existent in all centres. Similarly, understaffing, lack of expertise and trained tutors at local study centres seem to be other hindering factors.

In Nepal, postal services are not reliable. Therefore students were required to collect the course materials from CDET or its study centres. Although transportation facilities were available in urban areas, often these services were obstructed due to Banda, demonstrations and strikes. Additionally, not all Nepalese households have access to electricity, and even where electricity is accessible, a regular supply is constrained by planned 'load-shedding'. During my fieldwork, there was up to eighteen hours of power cuts in a day in Kathmandu and while modifying the questionnaires, I often relied on cybercafés and other venues where the power supply was backed up by generators, or rechargeable batteries. DE in Nepal is, therefore, also constrained by poor physical infrastructure (e.g., college buildings, classrooms, postal, transport, electricity), and inadequate communication infrastructure (e.g., computer, internet, multimedia), human infrastructure (e.g., lack of expertise to design the DL course materials, inadequate and untrained staffing).

More importantly, because of poor availability of financial resources, the college was not able to develop and maintain physical, technological and human infrastructure. The college was not supported financially by the university, or the government. To ensure effective functioning of a DE institution, there is a need for minimum infrastructure and resources, at the institution and its local study centres. Nevertheless, as I discuss later, an enabling political environment, sustained political commitment and will, and government funding seem to be essential in managing adequate infrastructure and resources at CDET in Nepal.

### **8.2.3 Administrative effectiveness and efficiency**

As discussed in Chapter Six, the majority of students at CDET reported that a key weakness of the distance B.Ed. programme was related to poor management and administration. Effective and efficient management and administration is fundamental to achieving programme success. Nevertheless, an administrative barrier at CDET and BirMet was the loosely formulated organisational structure and administrative arrangements for the effective implementation and delivery of the programme. For example, Chapter Seven reported how the CDET authorities were concerned about the lack of Faculty of Education (FOE) and subject committees within the university, and the administrative aspects of the B.Ed. programme being handled by the Faculty of Management. CDET authorities stressed the need to recruit senior officials including a Dean and other faculty members and staff, and establish a DE division at university level. As I discuss later, political interference also plays a role in decision-making at universities in Nepal. The creation of university-wide units such as Dean and registrar office, curriculum development division, student support division, human resource division, administration and management division may help enhance the administrative efficiency. Therefore, at university level, the lack of appropriate organisational structures impeded the delivery of a high quality administrative service.

Additionally, administrative efficiency cannot be ensured by establishing organisational structures alone, it requires committed administrative leadership and continuing support for the long-term nurturing and growth of the DE programme (Willis, 1993). In this study, students, tutors, and administrators at CDET often criticised the university management and administrative staff for the lack of responsibility and accountability in procedures and tasks. It is necessary, therefore, to promote a culture of transparency and accountability among faculty, staff, and administration for the university to function well. Administrative, faculty and other staff should seek to act in the interest of the institution for which they are responsible. The challenge for the university is to create a more positive institutional culture, and encourage faculty, staff and other members to demonstrate professionalism and integrity. To a certain extent, establishing mechanisms to prevent administrative and other staff from misusing their position and power may help solve this issue.

Another factor leading to poor administration was the lack of an effective system for communication. As reported in Chapter Six, CDET and BirMet administration were not able to deal with student enquiries quickly and promptly, and communication between CDET and its local centres appeared to be infrequent and poor. Both of these were due to a poor or non-existent ICT infrastructure; the lack of an appropriate system to handle enquiries and complaints; and inadequate administrative staff at college, its study centres and the university itself. CDET authorities reported that part of the problem resulted from the fact that some administrative staff, at local level, had limited understanding of DE, and lacked training. Similarly, administrative members, at university level, were politically motivated, uncooperative or unresponsive. There needs to be good communication as well as liaison and cooperation between the university and CDET centres to ensure administrative efficiency.



Likewise, the data showed that Information Management System (IMS) was poor at the University and the college. Due to the lack of appropriate technology, student records, including their assessments and examinations results, were manually kept, and were not easily accessible to administrators, tutors and students. As noted in Chapter Six, the examination results of some students were inappropriately reported, while others suffered the loss of academic certificates. Therefore, the university and college needs to collaborate in order to develop an effective IMS to ensure that tutors', students', and administrative staff records are accurate, up-to-date, secure and easily accessible. Yet again one of the major constraints for the poor record keeping system appears to be inadequate financial resources available to the college and university.

Thus, the growth and success of the DE programme in Nepal depends on effective management, committed educational leadership, adequate staffing, professional and healthy organisational culture, appropriate organisational systems and sufficient financial arrangements.

#### **8.2.4 Course design, delivery and review**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the literature suggests that an effective approach to course and materials design, the choice of appropriate media for course delivery, and periodic reviews of the course and instructional materials, are integral parts of DE system. Instructional designers need to ensure that minimum standards for course development, design and delivery are met through a periodic review of the materials and delivery system. However, whether or not DE institutions in a development context can pay attention to these critical aspects is another matter. For example, as discussed in Chapter Five, study materials provided by CDET were low in quality. The college was not able to develop self-instructional materials for some subjects; study materials for some subjects were poorly designed; and content presentation was

poor. The importance of ‘access devices’ and ‘tutorial-in-print’ (Rowntree, 1992), and the ideas of a ‘reflective action guide’ (Lockwood, 1992) and ‘guided didactic conversation’ (Holmberg, 1983), was not given priority when developing the study materials. Study materials demonstrated low levels of interactivity or ‘learner-content-interaction’ (Moore and Kearsley, 1996), which may be partly attributed to the existing sociocultural traditions in the country. The learner-content-interaction is likely to promote understanding, and not merely rote memorisation of subject matter (Bertram, 2003). Rowntree (1994a, p. 42) suggests that instructional designers should consider five essential factors while developing the DL course:

- a. Demographic factor: age, sex, occupation
- b. Motivation: why students are undertaking the course, relevance of programme to students, expectations of students from the course
- c. Learning factor: students belief about learning, their skills and learning styles
- d. Student background: prior experience in the subject areas, their attitude to subjects
- e. Resource factors: where, when and how students will be learning, access to media and learning resources

Course developers at CDET seemed to have considered some of the factors such as motivation, learning factors or belief about learning (e.g., exam oriented), and resource factors. As reported in Chapter Five, some of the students were concerned about the lack of attention given to their previous background, or knowledge, while developing the study materials, and they found the materials difficult to follow and understand. However, it is important to recognise that CDET was facing several challenges in the production of quality course materials, such as the lack of experience, lack of expertise in the production of DL materials, inadequate finances, and lack of support from the university and the government. Therefore, as I point out later, collaborative partnerships may help solve some of the issues related to DL materials production at CDET.

Due to restricted access to communication technologies, and most importantly due to the high cost involved in incorporating ICT facilities, CDET predominantly relied on print media, accompanied by face-to-face sessions, for course delivery. Such forms of learning can be considered as “materials-based teaching and learning” (Rowntree, 1997, p. 46) . In the ‘materials-based learning systems’ (e.g., open learning, distance learning, or supported self-study), students depend more on study materials, and less on face-to-face teaching, than they do in other types of learning systems (Rowntree, 1998). However, at CDET, because of the lack of educational technology, limited access to ICT facilities, and because of poor quality or unavailability of study materials, face-to-face tutorial sessions were also considered important to reinforce DL. As pointed out in previous chapters, students and tutors believed that the college and the university need to rethink its course delivery media, and improve the delivery of the B.Ed. programme by use of better communication technology.

Moreover, DE institutions need to regularly review the delivery media used to ensure the quality and effectiveness of such media. For this purpose, information and perspectives from relevant stakeholders such as students, tutors and instructional designers can be collected as part of a regular review process. Students and tutors emphasised the need for a periodic review of course study materials to identify weaknesses and errors, and to ensure their quality and relevance. Again inadequate finances, and lack of support from the university, were reported as major factors hindering the (re)design and review of SLMs.

### **8.2.5 Student support mechanisms**

Another pervasive theme underlying DE is the extent of support provided to distance learners. As discussed in Chapter Six, several authors argue for the need of supporting students (Mills, 2003; Tait, 2000; Simpson, 2002). According to these scholars, support can be provided through various ways:

- a. Academic support: support built into the course materials, orientation sessions and face-to-face tutorials, and feedback on assessments and students' progress
- b. Administrative support: through administrative staff at the regional and local study centre
- c. Affective support: through a special counselling team at DE institutions, and through the learning community

One form of academic support at CDET was in-built into the study materials, although, as discussed earlier, the learner-content-interaction and the degree of interactivity in the study materials were poor. Another important source of academic support was induction sessions and face-to-face tutorials. Face-to-face tutorials provide distance learners with opportunities for interaction, to communicate their learning needs, for finding solution to problems, and for obtaining feedback on study and progress. Rowntree (1997, p. 56) argues that although not all distance learners feel the need for face-to-face tutorials, many value the opportunities for interaction and feedback, and therefore, he suggests integrating face-to-face sessions into the course design - both "to ensure effective learning and to encourage the flow of supportive *social-glue*". Such face-to-face sessions, according to him, can take various forms such as tutorials, briefing or debriefing sessions, occasional presentations, experience-sharing sessions, practical sessions, remedial sessions, and progress tests. However, as pointed out in Chapter Seven, students were critical about the lack of student-tutor and student-student interaction opportunities during the tutorial sessions.

Most of the frustrations and complaints, regarding academic support, reported by students in all study centres, were tutor related such as tutors being too busy, over reliance on lecturing, not providing discussion opportunities, and lack of prompt feedback on assignments. Tutors at CDET and its local centres were on part-time contracts and because of the financial difficulties

CDET could not afford full-time tutors. Additionally, tutors were working full-time at other educational institutions, and did not have time to respond quickly to students' needs and queries. Although tutors' contact numbers were provided to students, as reported in Chapter Six, because of their job commitments, it was difficult for students to find suitable times to contact their tutors. As a result, it was very difficult for students to access tutors and receive academic support outside tutorial sessions. I noticed that even during the tutorial sessions, because of tutors' workloads, they were more concerned with providing lecture notes and completing the lecturing of certain units, and rarely had time for interaction and discussion. At the end of the 7-8 hours of tutorials, students who are physically and mentally tired are unlikely to focus on discussion and experience sharing. Perhaps increasing the number of contact sessions, recruiting more full-time or part-time tutors to support students beyond face-to-face sessions, and providing tutors with appropriate training to enact their roles, may alleviate this problem to a certain degree.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the majority of students were frustrated due to the lack of prompt administrative support. In particular, they were critical about the lack of an academic calendar, a poor record keeping system, delays in conducting examinations and in the publication of examination results. These administrative issues were directly related to the University, and CDET could not do much about solving these issues. Administrative services at most CDET centres were managed by centre coordinators and/or family members, who were serving full-time at other public and private colleges, and they were not easily accessible outside face-to-face sessions. Furthermore, there seemed to be a lack of coordination between the CDET and its study centres. Establishing an effective system of communication, and sharing of information, experiences and problems between the administrative and other members of staff appear to be essential in improving internal administrative efficiency. More importantly, at the

CDET and local centre level, staffing shortage was a major cause of poor administrative support.

Similarly, as mentioned in Chapter Six, students also reported that they were frustrated, felt isolated and irritated due to the lack of appropriate support from the college and the university. In such cases, students may require affective support such as counselling and guidance. However, affective support did not appear to be considered important at CDET. The college did have a provision of resource persons (RPs), to provide academic and affective support, but, as with tutors, RPs were not easily accessible, or available, to provide support when needed.

As elucidated in Chapter Three, the creation of study circles/learning networks or a learning community of practice may also help foster student-to-student interactions and enhance DL experiences in the Nepalese DE context. Although I did not find any sustained student learning networks, or learning community at CDET, some students reported that they had formed an informal learning circle, and shared educational resources and materials. Because of the fact that CDET centre in Kathmandu had experienced and qualified tutors (some of them were also involved in marking examination papers), students from other centres reported that they used to contact students there to ask for tutors notes, hand-outs, and other learning materials. This is similar to the experience reported by Bertram (2003) that students on a teacher education course in South Africa found the informal study groups to be crucial for promoting affective support, particularly for providing motivational support and to achieve a certain level of learning.

Nonetheless, because of the lack of adequate staff, busy tutors, lack of coordination between the CDET centres and the university, lack of access and or availability of ICT facilities, student support services at CDET seem to have been affected. For example, only a few students and tutors reported that they used emails to reinforce distance learning and teaching. However,

most of the students reported that they used mobile phones to receive academic and administrative support, although such use was constrained by time and availability of support staff. It seems, therefore, that use of mobile phones and learning circles may be very useful to provide support to students in Nepal.

#### **8.2.6 Monitoring, evaluation and review**

Monitoring, evaluation and review, at institutional level, is crucial for maintaining the quality and relevance of educational programmes. Therefore, internal quality assessment (IQA) should be a regular part of quality assurance at institutional level in order to ensure and achieve optimum levels in areas such as curriculum design and materials; adequacy of infrastructure and resources; technology and media used; teaching and learning; student, faculty and staff support adequacy. IQA is essential to strengthen the overall operation of the programme, and the institution offering the programme. However, to carry out IQA, systematic policies, procedures and guidelines, as well as adequate funding resources, are required at institutional level (Jung, 2008; Jung et al, 2011; Umar, 2006).

As far as quality standards are concerned, they may vary depending on national and educational contexts. As I discuss later, there is no clarity about whether the quality assurance (QA) mechanism for higher education, and higher education and training through distance mode needs to be the same. In Nepal, the University Grants Commission (UGC) emphasises the need for internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms at institutional level, as one of the criteria for participation in the national quality assurance and accreditation (QAA) process. To ensure that the IQA system is tied up with national QA mechanism, UGC in Nepal has provided guidelines for carrying out self-assessment in educational institutions. Jung (2008, p 615) argues that IQA systems need to be 'closely linked to the national QA framework, internal QA policies comply

with the national QA standards and procedures, and are well integrated in their general university policy and performance framework’.

As shown in the Table 19, in Nepal, UGC’s guidelines for institutional assessment and for preparing a self-assessment report (SSR) include eight areas:

**Table 19: UGC Self-Assessment Report Guidelines**

	<b>Generic Criteria</b>	<b>Weightage %</b>
1	Institutional policy and procedures	15
2	Curricular aspects	10
3	Teaching-learning and evaluation	15
4	Research, consultancy and extension	10
5	Infrastructure and learning resources	20
6	Student support and guidance	10
7	Information management system	10
8	Availability of public information	10
Total		100

The above generic criteria are the priorities set by UGC, but the criteria do not consider important issues such as staffing and human resource development, and administrative and management aspects. IQA indicators and benchmarks vary with contexts and educational institutions. For example, UGC India considers the following criteria for assessing DE institutions (see Distance Education Council, 2009):

- Infrastructure and human resource capabilities
- Academic programmes and learning resources
- Learner support services
- Research and consultancy



- Governance
- Innovative practices (such as use of ICT, provision for access and equity)

UGC Nepal has not yet devised criteria for DE programme assessment. Currently, the primary responsibility for the B.Ed. programme evaluation rests with BirMet. The establishment of an IQA mechanism at institutional level would ensure that programme approval is informed by full consideration of academic standards and appropriateness of the programme to the context/market. IQA does not appear to be given a priority at CDET and BirMet, and there seems to be a need for both institutions to establish an 'IQA committee' which can set priorities, identify key areas to be considered for IQA and devise quality indicators or benchmarks. It is vital that CDET/BirMet need to review its programme to ensure its quality standards, of curriculum and study materials, of operation management, of staff and of human resource management, and to ensure professional accountability of those involved in academic activities, management and administration. When established, the IQA committee may consider key areas such as institutional plan and policies; implementation strategies; curriculum design and study materials development; teaching and learning and study centre activities; physical infrastructure and learning resources; staffing/faculty and human resource development and training; efficiency of management and administration; student support system; information management system; cost-effectiveness of the programme; research and consultancy; collaborative partnership; public information and marketing strategies; and quality of product or employment market of students after qualification.

Monitoring, follow-up, review and research processes can help obtain valuable information on programme functioning and quality. Based on this study, it seems important that BirMet needs to periodically review the DE programme in the light of feedback from students, tutors, administrators and other key players involved in the programme, and undertake critical

reflection on programme performance and progress. CDET did not have adequate qualified academic staff to monitor and review their programme, therefore the university and CDET authorities should consider worked collaboratively in order to establish systems for regular monitoring, and to undertake internal self-study, or external reviews with the help of the UGC, and take appropriate action based on the UGC's recommendations. For this purpose, financial and human resource support through UGC, or other external organisations may be necessary, as currently both CDET and the university appear to be poor in terms of financial and human resources for carrying out programme evaluation, and review, and the government could also encourage IQA by providing funds, such as allocating them some revenue from education tax.

### **8.2.7 Faculty and staff development and training**

Faculty and staff support and development is an important component of DE programmes, and because of the special needs of distance learners, tutors and staff require specialised skills, abilities, and training. Adequate training for faculty and staff prior to their engagement in DE programmes, and continuing support throughout the programme, are the most effective and efficient methods for ensuring long-term success in distance education (Willis, 1993). Although, CDET authorities and local study centre co-ordinators reported that a few training workshops were organised at local level, particularly in the early years of programme introduction, in recent years no such training opportunities had been made available to faculty, administrative and support staff. As reported in Chapter Seven, tutors recognised the need for training workshops, seminars, and hands-on activities, and opportunities to share experiences and common problems, to ensure that they enact their roles and responsibilities effectively. Equally, it is important to ensure that administrative and support staff also have appropriate skills and receive relevant training and development so that they can deliver effective support to tutors and students, and thereby strengthen the whole programme.

It is important that DE institutions encourage faculty and staff to maintain their expertise through training and on-going support, inspire research and publications, and strive to create a supportive environment and opportunities for their professional growth. Where possible, attractive incentives and rewards provision needs to be established to keep the faculty and staff motivated and committed to their professional activities. No such provision was evident at CDET. Data suggest that the university and CDET focus on capacity building, staff development and faculty support by establishing appropriate mechanisms for providing regular training and continuous support. Yet, because of the lack of funding, resources and expertise, CDET did not have established faculty and staff development and support mechanisms.

Additionally, as explained in Chapter Two, the role of teachers' community of practice has been considered crucial to enhance knowledge and skills and share good practices. Therefore, creating a 'tutors network' or learning community may encourage tutors, at CDET and its study centres, to share their problems, expertise, experiences and resources and learn from each other, so delivering better quality tutorials and support to distance students.

### **8.3 National factors affecting distance education**

It seemed that success and sustainability of a distance teacher education programme, in an under-resourced context, depends on the DE policies and implementation strategies, the socio-political situation, extent of government support, national regulatory and quality assurance framework and collaboration with national and international DE providers.

#### **8.3.1 Policy issues affecting distance education**

Haughey (2008) notes that the literature for national policies for DE are somewhat lacking. The absence of clear-cut national DE policies, and national implementation strategies, seems to have a negative impact on the success and sustainability of DE programmes in a developing

context. More than a decade ago, Nepal's Tenth Five-Year Plan flagged up the idea of an Open University in order to increase access to higher educational and teacher training opportunities to those who were unable to attend conventional courses due to their circumstances. I have presented the main objectives of the ODE policy framework envisioned by Nepal Government in Chapter Two, and details the policy implementation strategies can be found in Appendix XI.

The policy framework also envisioned strategies for curriculum development, institutional arrangements, certification and accreditation, learner support, funding and budgeting, and the use of technology media in the design and delivery of DL materials. The policy further states that the Distance Education and Open Learning Division (DEOLD), within the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED), "will be responsible and accountable for the policy formulation; course and programme approval; recognition and affiliation of the ODE institutes; certification/accreditation and implementation of the ODE programmes" (MoE, 2006, p. 4).

The policy makes no mention of what happens to the existing DE providers, such as the Institute of Open Learning, which are offering courses with the affiliation to national and international universities. It is not clear, in the policy, how infrastructure and learning facilities, and human resources, required for the effective implementation of ODE programmes, would be managed. The policy does state that a government grant will be obtained as a sole source of funding for ODE institutions at the initial stage. However, higher education (through distance mode) has not been a priority in the national budget in Nepal and a review of government spending on higher education between 2001-09 shows that the government allocated an average of only 10.3 per cent of the education budget to higher education which remained at an average of only around 1.5 per cent of the total national expenditure (UGC, 2012a).

For this reason, DE policy in a developing context, such as Nepal, needs to be informed by an appropriate contextual analysis and needs assessment so that government and other institutions

involved on regulating higher education and teacher training can identify key areas (e.g., curriculum materials development, physical facilities, management capacity, new communication technologies, and student support services) that require government support and set priorities. After the analysis of national context, examination of the institutional arrangements and perceived needs or rationale for DE programmes, the authorities can then make an informed decision about the level of financial support to be offered to DE institutions. Therefore, DE policy making not only requires research about contextual (e.g., social, political, economic) and operational (e.g., costs and effectiveness) information, but also the involvement of those who know and understand the potential of DE in influencing the outcome (McPherson and Nunes, 2004).

Furthermore, the existing ODE policy framework (i.e., ODE Policy 2006) in Nepal encompasses three entirely different areas: open schooling, improving the quality of conventional education, and higher education through distance mode. It seems that this policy mishmash needs to be reviewed and the Nepal government needs to develop a coherent ODE policy framework and a clear plan in support of for higher education as well as teacher development and training. The target groups of conventional education, open schooling, and higher education through distance mode are considerably different. These different groups require distinct institutional arrangements, human resource provisioning, pedagogical and methodological features, and different levels of support. Thus, it may be more appropriate for the government to devise separate policies, in relation to implementation strategies, funding and resource management, infrastructure and human resources development, for the face-to-face education system, open schooling and higher education and teacher training through distance mode.

Likewise, in which way and in what capacity private or nongovernment sectors can be involved in providing higher education and teacher training through distance mode, and how they would be supported by the government, does not seem clear in the policy. As noted in the previous chapter, some of the founder members of CDET were critical about the lack of clear policy on higher education and teacher training via distance mode. They highlighted the need for an autonomous National Higher Distance Education Commission for formulating policy guidelines as well as developing strategies. Therefore, in order to facilitate DE initiatives in Nepal the government, through DE policy, should ensure that both public and private institutions can offer education and training programmes through distance mode, provided that such programmes are closely aligned with the national DE policy intent and mission and meet the standards set by the national quality control agency. Additionally, conforming to national DE policies, clear procedures and guidelines for effective programme design and delivery need be developed at the university/institutional level. This study also identified that the DE policies in Nepal need to provide a clear explanation of how other colleges or institutions can affiliate themselves with universities, the quality standards that need to be met, and the level of autonomous power they can exercise. The lack of clear norms and transparent administrative procedures and lack of professionalism and integrity, often seem to have created conflict between the university and the CDET authorities, as evidenced by the lack of proper coordination and cooperation, delays in conducting and publishing examination results, indication of corruption in education (e.g., expectation of financial benefit to release examination results). Neither BirMet nor CDET appeared to have internal DE policy and plans to guide their actions.

Additionally, it seems that the government and the DE institution need to concentrate on enhancing policy frameworks for the successful implementation of DE provision for teacher development and training in Nepal. To ensure the sustainability of DE institutions, the political

leaders also need to use their vision and commitment, power and influence to ensure that teacher education programmes offered through distance mode receives on-going political support for its growth.

### **8.3.2 Political commitment and government support**

It appears that high levels of political commitment and government support are crucial for the DE vision and policies in a developing context to materialise. Political crises discussed in Chapter Two and the failure of the Nepal government to establish an Open University, despite having articulating a vision for it, suggest that some of factors responsible for the poor progress of the development of DE system in Nepal appear to be due to the lack of vision, absence of strong political will and courage, inability of political leadership to forge consensus on common national commitment to support distance teacher education, and failure to follow up recommendations and take action. For example, in the past, recommendations have been made to establish an Open University, and although the existing ODE policy guideline in Nepal stresses the establishment of Distance Education and Open Learning Division (DEOLD) and a separate examination board to ensure the quality of ODE programmes, until September 2012, no initiatives have been taken to materialise the policy intent. As described in Chapter Two, since political leaders, at high-level, concentrate more on acquiring political power, such motives seem to have affected their willingness to make DE a priority. Therefore, it may be argued that distance teacher education in Nepal is affected by both the level of political commitment, and in the ways this commitment is expressed in concrete terms.

The sustainability and success of teacher education through distance mode requires more than a government declaration in favour of DE. Sustained government commitment is required to supply financial and other resources required to strengthen the DE system. One of the key inhibiting factors for setting up and maintaining the standard of the DE programme is the large

amount of capital involved. For example, sustainable development of DE requires a substantial amount of initial investment in curriculum design and materials development, infrastructure and learning facilities, human resource development, media and technology use and student support services. A small DE institution like CDET, which relies solely on student fees, may not be able to afford foundation costs. According to UGC (2012a), out of total government spending on higher education 90 per cent of the funding goes to the oldest university, Tribhuvan University (TU), and BirMet receives very small funding support from the government. For example, in the academic year 2009/10, BirMet received NRS. 26.7 million, compared to TU, which received NRS. 3,090.6 million (UGC, 2012a). Furthermore CDET, being a privately run affiliated college, does not receive any funding support from the government or the University, instead, according to the CDET authorities, the college is required to pay NRS. 3,500 per year, about 22 per cent of the total amount collected from each student, to the university to handle administrative and other costs. As reported in the previous chapter, due to discouraging political conditions, CDET authorities were unwilling to increase capital investment, but pointed out the need for government support. Therefore, one of the main factors hindering the development of DE in Nepal seems to be the low level of public investment in education.

### **8.3.3 Socio-political context**

Based on my fieldwork and this study, I argue that the socio-political environment in which DE is embedded, influences the initiatives taken to advance the DE system in a development context like Nepal. I pointed out in Chapter Two that Nepal suffered heavily during a decade-long armed conflict from insecurities created by the violence. During the armed conflict, the obligation to allocate substantial funding resources to maintaining internal security have also constrained Nepal in raising government spending in DE.



Nepal has undergone significant social and political changes since 2006 in that political parties managed to end a decade-long armed conflict, abolished the monarchy and declared Nepal a secular, democratic and republican state. Yet the culture of corruption, struggles for power, political nepotism and various forms of impunity (e.g., forced donation, political protection to criminals, human rights abuse) continue to prevail to a greater degree (Thakuri, 2012). Additionally, political uncertainty and overarching security concerns continue to deepen, threatening not only the country's economic growth but also the whole education system. As reported by one of the founder members, CDET has not been able to increase investment in its programme, and infrastructure development, because of the lack of investment security in the country. Advocating an 'equal education for all', one of the major political parties often argues for the nationalisation of education, and the need to control the private sector's involvement in education, which seems to have created confusion among investors. Therefore, it seems that political leaders at high-level need to create an enabling environment for the private sector's involvement in DE. There is also need for a renewed effort from political leadership to assure the private sector of investment security in order to strengthen and expand teacher development and training through distance mode.

Another issue causing a negative impact on the growth of business and educational institutions in Nepal is that cadres of political parties request financial assistance from business organisations, and education institutions, in order to organise demonstrations and run campaigns, mobilize supporters, and conduct political activities. Refusal to provide financial contributions to political parties, or their leaders, may expose the institute and its authorities to vulnerability. As pointed out in the previous chapter, concerns have been raised by the authorities of CDET regarding the impact of political instability, Banda and (forced) donations on its function and development. Small DE institution, such as CDET, which relies solely on

student fees and is struggling to maintain operational costs, may not be able to provide financial contributions to support political activities.

The Nepalese government provides limited financial assistance to political parties for their election campaigns, and so political parties raise their funds in any way that they can. Although, the Election Commission has a mandate to monitor the financial transactions of political parties, and legally political parties are required to submit their annual financial details to the commission, they rarely comply with this requirement. For example, in January 2012, the Election Commission threatened political parties with legal action for failure to submit income and expenditure reports after the election of the Constitutional Assembly<sup>29</sup>. The political instability and corruption are aggravated by some politicians with vested interests who strive to gain power and financial benefits, rather than serve the interest of the country and general public.

Additionally, although the culture of Banda and strikes support the rationale for DE in Nepal, in practice such issues have a negative impact on the functioning of CDET. For instance, on many occasions Bandas and strikes have caused temporary closure of the institution, cancellation of prescheduled contact session tutorials and have created difficulties for students travelling to examination centres. Therefore, in order to allow educational institutions to grow and flourish, Nepalese political leaders should work towards establishing peace and security, and maintaining a stable political environment in the country. With the current unstable political situation and ongoing crisis, the growth and sustainability of DE institutions appears to be uncertain in Nepal.

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<sup>29</sup> Sharma, Bhadra. 2012. 42 Political Parties to Face EC Action. The Kathmandu Post, 29 January.

Another inhibiting factor seems to be the interference of politics in the education sector. Political intervention is a routine affair in the appointment and recruitment of high level educational officials (e.g., VC, Registrar, Dean) in Nepalese universities, and these senior officers in academia influence the appointment of faculty and administrative staff to a certain degree. Rather than focusing on expertise and professionalism, political parties give preference to their supporters in the appointment process, and every change in government is likely to result in the reshuffle of senior personnel at universities. As a result, administrative staff and faculty members tend to be more loyal towards the political parties and their leaders rather than being responsible and committed towards their profession, or to the educational institutions they serve. Political interference and nepotism not only threatens the functioning of the institutions but more importantly the quality of education programmes. For example, as reported in Chapter Seven, the CDET authorities were critical about the BirMet University administration for the lack of cooperation and support, about the intentional delays conducting student viva and in realising examination results, and about the malpractice at the university. Some administrators and study centre co-ordinators even accused the university administration of demanding supplementary remuneration, which could be considered a bribe, for the release of results. However, one of the administrative members of the university reported that examination results were delayed because the university administration were doubtful about the standards employed by CDET while carrying out students' internal and practical assessments. In opposition, the college authorities pointed out that in spite of their requests to appoint a viva panel and the timely conduct of student practicum viva by the university personnel, the university deliberately delayed the process. Because the overwhelming majority of students at CDET were civil service officials and bureaucrats serving at various government ministries and taking the distance B.Ed. course with a prospect of job promotion, CDET tutors or founder members indicated (cf. Chapter Six) that some administrative members of the

university appeared to have formed the impression that delaying the practicum viva and examination results would create pressure on the college leading them to pay extra to the university in order to hold the viva and publish the exam results promptly.

All public universities and colleges in Nepal have student wings, workers/staff unions, and teacher associations linked to different political parties in the country. These political groups work in the interest of their own parties and even create unnecessary obstructions to the overall functioning of the universities and colleges (e.g., damaging property or padlocking college/university) to pressure the university management, and the government, into fulfilling their demands. Although, perhaps, being a private educational institutional, student politics was not reported as an issue at CDET, during my fieldwork, BirMet remained closed on a few occasions due to student politics at the university level.

#### **8.3.4 Collaborative partnership**

Collaboration and partnerships with international DE institutions appear to be crucial in order to enhance institutional capacity, strengthen DE initiatives and to raise the standards of such programmes in a developing context. In this study, the data revealed that the severe lack of resources (e.g. physical, financial, technical, and human) have constrained DE initiatives in Nepal. As noted in the previous chapter, tutors and administrators at CDET clearly pointed out the need for collaboration with established DE institutions. They also stressed that teaching, administrative and support staff should have opportunities to participate in training workshops and conferences as well to become involved in research, in order to enhance their knowledge and skills of the guidelines and good practices of learning and teaching at a distance. They perceived that such opportunities would help them share experiences and gain additional technical know-how of DE. However, their hopes of visiting DE institutions, or to participate

in conferences, had not been possible due to the financial constraints and the lack of sponsorship.

DE institutions in developing contexts can build on good practices through cooperation and collaboration with established DE providers. The sharing of expertise, experience and resources may help increase the quality of DE programmes in under-resourced contexts. Collaborative partnerships can be created in various areas such as in developing new courses, developing or adapting course materials, strengthening infrastructure and learning facilities, enhancing student support services, human resource development, collaborating in research, and organising workshops and seminars. For example, the British Open University collaborates with several international academic institutions. Through collaborative partnerships, the university shares good practices, offers a diverse range of courses, and sells study guides and course materials. The popularity of the Open University courses and study materials overseas shows that the quality of DE programmes can be enhanced by the sharing of well-designed learning resources, expertise, experience and good practice of DE. Likewise, UNISA in South Africa, is a leading DE provider in the country but it offers DE programmes in collaboration with both public and private institutions, provided that they are registered, accredited and meet the required quality standards. UNISA also encourages educational institutions to collaborate with the university to deliver student support services. Additionally, the university is also involved in international collaborative partnerships to develop an open source collaborative learning environment called 'Sakai' (Tait, 2004). Likewise, the British Open University-led Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) is another influential co-operative international teacher education programme which focuses on the production of a wide range of open resource materials to support school based teacher education and training.

In order to promote and improve the quality of the distance teacher education programmes in Nepal, cooperative collaboration between a range of national and international educational institutions seem to be essential. In future, collaboration with the private sector, non-government organisations and partnerships with international academic institutions may help ensure the sustainability and enhance quality of DE programmes in Nepal. Similarly, inter-university alliances may be useful in Nepal, particularly through the sharing of physical resources such as university and college buildings for contact session tutorials. For example, Tribhuvan University has the largest network of public and community colleges across the country and these colleges could be used for contact session tutorials as contact sessions at CDET are normally conducted at weekends or public holidays. Nonetheless, to avoid conflict, and to address the issue of remuneration, the roles and responsibilities of collaborative partners need to be addressed through concrete policy, and implementation strategies and regulatory mechanisms, both at national and institutional level.

### **8.3.5 Quality assurance and accreditation mechanism**

The conceptualisation of DE as ‘massification’ or rapid expansion of access to higher education and teacher training inevitably raises concerns for quality assurance (QA). There have been debates about the standards and mechanisms for assuring quality of distance programmes (Latchem and Jung., 2010). Although, in many countries, a quality assurance mechanism is closely linked to a national QA framework for higher education (e.g., OUUK), some scholars argue that because of the distinctive characteristics of DE, traditional quality assurance criteria and methods cannot be applied to DE without significant adjustments or a reinterpretation of the criteria (Lentell, 2003), and in the context of globalisation, existing QA mechanisms need to be reviewed (Green et al., 2009). Most DE institutions in Asia tend to have a quality assurance framework at national level or at institutional level (see Jung et al., 2011). However,

India is one of the few countries which have a separate QA mechanism for DE and the Distance Education Council (DEC) is mandated to set up standards and criteria for QA and accreditations (i.e., institutional accreditation, and programme accreditation).

Although higher education and teacher development through distance mode in Nepal has not been rapidly expanded yet, DE programme quality issues cannot be ignored. Therefore, quality assessment and control mechanisms, at national level, are required to ensure that DE institutions meet acceptable academic standards and academic quality. Nonetheless, Nepal does not have an established DE QA agency. Currently, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) division, within the University Grants Commission (UGC), is responsible for executing quality assessment and accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions, including cross-border and trans-national providers in the country (if directed by UGC and or MoE). UGC provides self-assessment formats, and conducts peer reviews and audits of HEIs.

However, CDET seems to be ineligible to partake in the QAA process based on one of the criteria of UGC which requires that HEIs must have 50% full-time teachers, and CDET and its local study centres mostly relied on part-time tutors and staff. In addition, participation in the QAA process seems to be voluntary rather than mandatory as the HEIs have to submit a 'letter of intent' in order to participate. Therefore, it appears that the importance of quality is a low priority in the higher education sector in Nepal. In this respect, the government and QAA agencies should encourage HEIs to establish internal quality assurance systems and to carry out independent self-assessment of their programmes to identify weaknesses and to improve programme quality. The ODE Policy Framework 2006 has stated that to ensure the quality of DE, a special QA mechanism would be put in place. Yet, at the time of writing this thesis, neither the MoE nor the government of Nepal seem to have taken any initiatives to implement

and enforce the ODE policy decisions. As a result, quality of distance teacher education programme also remains an issue in Nepal.

## **8.4 Facilitators of and barriers to distance teacher education**

Based on the experiences and perspectives of tutors and students, observation of documents, and my fieldwork, this study identifies several factors that affect the distance B.Ed. programme at CDET in Nepal. I present a summary of factors that drive, facilitate or hinder teacher education through distance mode in Nepal.

### **8.4.1 Facilitating Factors**

In Chapter Two, I pointed out that the reasons for using distance mode for teacher education and training are varied. In Nepal the aim of the distance B.Ed. programme, according to CDET authorities, was to reach a geographically scattered population and to increase access to teacher development and training opportunities. Additionally, apart from enabling prospective teachers to obtain a valid teaching qualification, the programme has also been supporting civil servants in their career development and job promotion. In these early years of the distance B.Ed. programme, the fees paid by the latter group, though not prospective teachers but which forms the largest percentage of students, enable the course to develop and group. CDET authorities, despite being in a political and cultural environment that was not supportive of educational innovation, were very optimistic about their efforts and the future of education and training through distance mode in Nepal. Despite several problems and challenges, I found that CDET founder members, administrators and tutors had patience, incredible enthusiasm, determination and motivation which were the main driving forces in making the distance B.Ed. programme work in this context. In this regard, one of the founder members of the college expressed his commitment and enthusiasm in this way:



*We are a non-profit organisation. We have not received any funding and other support from the government yet. You are also aware of the fact that we are operating in a very difficult political context and we are limited as to what we can do due to the lack of adequate financial, technological, human and other resources required for the effective implementation of the programme. Because of a continuing deterioration of the political situation in the country, we have not been able to increase the number of study centres and extend our network throughout Nepal. We hope that political parties focus on creating a conducive environment for educational development. We believe that distance education can contribute significantly to widening educational opportunities and training in a post-conflict country like Nepal. We are very much committed and do believe, however, that we will be successful in our mission [i.e., increasing access to teacher education through distance mode]. We are also planning to offer a distance M.Ed. course, and have already prepared a concept paper for this. We are very much excited about this.*

[Sudip]

In the course of informal talks, another founder member of CDET also indicated that a favourable political environment, support from the government and collaboration with established DE institutions would contribute to the initiatives. However, as outlined in the section below, this study identified several factors impeding the quality and growth of the distance teacher education programme in Nepal.

#### **8.4.2 Hindering factors**

From the discussion in sections 8.2 and 8.3, several factors can be identified as restricting the growth and success of the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal. Nevertheless, the most prominent factors that hinder programme development are the unstable political environment,

poor economic condition, and unsatisfactory institutional context of the DE system in the country. The most significant inhibiting factors include:

### **Political situation**

- a. Political instability leading to frequent change in government
- b. Frequent Bandas and strikes
- c. Lack of commitment from political leaders
- d. Political interference in educational institutions

### **Economic condition**

- a. Poverty and insufficient financial resources for the design and development of DE system
- b. Lack of government funding and low public spending on the education sector

### **Educational/Institutional context**

- a. Lack of clear national DE policy and implementation framework
- b. Absence of quality assurance and control mechanism for DE system
- c. Poor physical infrastructure and learning resources
- d. Poorly written, inadequate or non-existent Self-Learning Materials
- e. Incompetent administration and management
- f. Shortage of expertise and experience in learning and teaching at a distance, and untrained or poorly trained tutors and staff
- g. Inadequate organisational staffing
- h. Poor communication and cooperation between CDET, its centres and the university
- i. Poor or non-existent student, faculty and staff support system

- j. Inadequate and lack of appropriate organisational structure (e.g., insufficient local study centres, faculty of education at the university)

## **8.5 Conclusion**

The quality of the distance teacher education programme in Nepal appears to be influenced by a complex array of factors such as the lack of clear education policy, financial and infrastructure resources, low administrative efficiency, and insufficient faculty and staff, which are intricately interwoven. For instance, this study revealed that besides low quality learning materials, poor student support services and an unclear quality assurance framework, the performance of DE institutions is inextricably linked to the social, economic, and political context in a developing country like Nepal. The socio-political situation should be taken into account, therefore, in order to gain a fuller understanding of DE in a development context. Therefore, based on a comprehensive review of literature on DE, I developed a new framework which proved very useful while trying to understand DE practices in a development and under-resourced context. I highlighted factors that drive DE initiatives, and factors that dissuade and deter the success and growth of DE in a developing context. To conclude, clear DE policies and implementation strategies, enabling political environment and government support, sustained institutional commitment to quality, management of appropriate financial resources, effective administration and management, use of appropriate communication technology, adequate student support, continuous efforts to faculty and staff developments and support, collaborative partnerships and periodically reviews of programmes, are essential to promote and sustain DE programmes. In the next chapter, I summarise my research findings.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Introduction

The main focus of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of the distance B.Ed. programme offered by CDET in Nepal. In order to achieve this, I explored the experiences and views of students and tutors/founder members involved in the programme. Furthermore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the programme, after a comprehensive review of the literature on DE, building on existing frameworks, I developed a new analytical framework appropriate for the Nepalese context. As described in Chapter Four, to gather empirical evidence about the phenomenon being investigated, I used a case study approach, which allowed me flexibility in terms of *methodological triangulation* or in using multiple methods of data collection. This qualitative case study approach also allowed me to explore real life experiences, and to uncover complexities specific to the educational context, and problems encountered by students and tutors involved in the distance teacher education programme. I explored my secondary research questions in Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Chapter Eight provided discussion on some of the key areas of concern reported by students and tutors. In this concluding chapter, drawing on the themes described and discussed in the preceding chapters, I consolidate various issues and concerns raised by students, tutors/founder members to address my primary research question:

*What insights can be gained from the experiences and perspectives of students and tutors involved in the distance B.Ed. programme at CDET in Nepal? How can the B.Ed. programme be made more effective?*

First, I summarise the findings related to the primary research question, and then make some suggestions as to what more could be done to improve the quality, and ensure sustainability of

the distance B.Ed. programme. I then consider some limitations as well as major contribution of this study, and also provide some potential avenues for further research. Finally, I describe my learning as a novice researcher, what I have learned about the distance mode teacher education in Nepal and how this research experience might impact on my future professional career.

## **9.2 Summary of findings**

### **9.2.1 Target audience of the course**

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the study is related to the student characteristics or the types of students who were undertaking the course. Although the target audience for the distance B.Ed. course was prospective teachers, the study revealed that the majority of students on the course were civil servants, taking the course as a means to job promotion rather than enhancing teaching skills or developing a career in teaching. As described in Chapter Six, the majority of students stated that they were undertaking the course for promotion (87.9%), followed by Banda/Strikes causing difficulty in accessing traditional universities (77.6%), and the fact that they could study while working (70.7%). Additionally, some of the students, who were working in the Ministry of Education, or serving in other ministries or bodies of the Nepal government (e.g., Ministry of Home Affairs, Inland Revenue, Election Commission, District Education Office), found the course relevant and useful for their professional needs, as their job responsibilities included teacher education and training, or the ensuring of administrative efficiency. Nevertheless, the majority of students were undertaking, or had studied, the course as a means to increase their promotion prospects. In Nepal, the promotion of bureaucrats is normally based on their seniority, educational qualifications and merits. In previous years, one of the criteria required by the Public Service Commission (PSC) for bureaucrats to be eligible and/or have priority for promotion to higher positions was a first class academic degree (at

least bachelor's degree, normally of 3 years), and the one-year B.Ed. was not recognised by the commission to serve this purpose. As a result, bureaucrats and other government employees holding second class academic degree were less likely to be promoted to higher positions. Nevertheless, a few years ago, the PSC relaxed this stipulation and allowed the one-year B.Ed. to be used for promotion purposes, provided that any applicant for promotion held the qualification with first division (aggregate 60% or above). This then provided a second promotion opportunity to serving bureaucrats, and other government employees, provided that they met the new criteria. Although one-year B.Ed. courses are offered by many face-to-face universities, this particular B.Ed. seems to serve the purpose for these full-time working and ambitious people. Furthermore, the study revealed that the majority of students were enrolled for School Management and Supervision (SMS) as this subject did not require the students to engage in Teaching Practice in school classrooms, and also the management aspect was deemed to be useful in their daily work.

### **9.2.2 Curriculum material and course delivery**

Because of the lack of availability of and access to educational technology, print-media was the predominant mode of the B.Ed. course delivery. Although the course contained a clearly defined syllabus, SLMs lacked adequate content coverage, were difficult to read and comprehend, and were out-dated. These materials were poor in terms of learner-content interaction, content organisation and presentation, use of teaching narratives, and the use of access devices such as signposting, summaries, review activities, glossary and references. In other words, the materials did not adequately represent the characteristics of self-instructional materials such as well-structured, well-paced, interactive and engaging (Endean, 2003; Rowntree, 1990, 1992, 1994a). Therefore, this study shows that the study materials need to be reviewed and updated in order to address the needs of distance learners.

Additionally, SLMs, and the assessment system, at CDET reflected a philosophy of teacher-centred and content-oriented pedagogy. Activities and assessment tasks lacked clear guidance and instruction on how to approach them. Because of the absence of clear assessment guidelines and marking criteria, the majority of students considered that the marking of their assignments was arbitrary and unfair. It was also found that the course over-relied on a formal written examination.

It appeared that the course materials development process required the input of tutors, subject matter experts, instructional designers, students, and technical specialists. The integration of educational technology in the course design and delivery could enhance teaching and learning at a distance. Nevertheless, the study identified that major barriers to high quality course materials production and delivery were inadequate finances, a lack of experience, and shortage of expertise in DL materials writing as well as a lack of availability and access to communication and information technology. Since any increase in student fees was likely to affect student enrolment at CDET, financial support from government or other institutions appears crucial in order to review and update these study materials and improve their quality. The study also points out the need for appropriate training for DL course designers and materials writers. Perraton and Creed (1999) also point to the training needs for course developers and practitioners, particularly in three contexts: the subject-specific contexts, the socio-cultural context, and the DL context.

### **9.2.3 Educational infrastructure and learning resources**

Another key finding was that CDET was functioning with poor and limited physical, technological, and educational infrastructure and learning resources. CDET and its local study centres were operating in rented properties, built for residential purposes, and lecture rooms were congested, with some being too dark, or too hot, to conduct the tutorials, particularly

during power cuts. Problems with a lack of toilets, drinking water, and canteen facilities were also evident.

Another issue was the lack of technological and communication infrastructure. Because of the high cost of, and poor access to, educational technology, use of new communication technology in support of DL was restricted at CDET. Only one centre managed to use a couple of computers to keep records of some of its administrative tasks. Nonetheless, the use of ICT, particularly mobile phones and SMS was evident at CDET, but on a smaller scale, as the use of mobile phones was constrained by the fact that tutors and students were busy, and it was difficult for them to find a convenient time to contact each other.

Furthermore, library and learning resources were almost non-existent and due to the lack of library facilities, reference books and supplementary materials, students had to rely on some of the books published by another university.

Again, the inability of the college to develop and maintain the physical, technological and education infrastructure is restricted by inadequate financial resources. The college was not supported financially by the university or the government. Additionally, the study also found that due to constant political instability threatening investment security, founder members of CDET were reluctant to increase capital investment or to find alternative sources of funding. Instead, they reiterated the fact that the government should create an enabling political environment and support DE initiatives. Therefore, it appears that to ensure effective functioning, there is a need for minimum infrastructure and resources at CDET and its local study centres. For that reason, CDET needs to rethink and strengthen its physical and technological infrastructure, and ensure adequate educational facilities and resources, and where available should consider the application of new communication technology in facilitating the distance teaching and learning process.



#### **9.2.4 Management and administration**

As reported by students and tutors, in Chapters Six and Seven, due to the poor management, lack of adequate staffing and incompetence of the BirMet and CDET administration, the overall functioning of the University as well as the college seem to have been seriously affected. Students employed the words ‘weak’, ‘unresponsive’, ‘uncooperative’, and ‘corrupt’ to refer to the BirMet management and administration. Therefore, they pointed out a need for an efficient, transparent and responsive administrative system at both CDET and BirMet. The university had not followed its academic calendar, scheduled its practicum viva, conducted the examination or released the examination results in a timely manner. Students, tutors and local staff all recognised these failings as very serious problems.

At the college and local study centres, administrative services were affected by the lack of adequately trained staff. Apart from the Kathmandu centre, none of the other centres had full-time administrative staff. Therefore, it was almost impossible to meet staff members at these centres outside face-to-face tutorials sessions. Yet again, due to the lack of adequate financial resources, CDET local centres were unable to recruit full-time staff and faculty members. This study also found that there was poor coordination and collaboration between the university, CDET and local study centres.

Although the university was established more than a decade ago, it still lacks appropriate institutional structures such as a Faculty of Education. In August 2012, when I spoke to the CDET principal by telephone, he informed me that the university had appointed a Dean for the first time who is currently responsible for establishing a Faculty of Education, other administrative structures and mechanisms, and ensuring the required human resources and organisational staffing. The creation of university-wide units such as a Dean and Registrar’s office, curriculum development division, student support division, human resource division,

and administration and management division may help enhance the administrative efficiency of BirMet. Hopefully, some of the administrative barriers may be removed when the appropriate administrative structure and mechanisms are established, as well as transparent administrative processes and procedures being put in place to handle the DE system at university level.

Additionally, CDET authorities and students also indicated some forms of corruption and malpractice at the University. The students, tutors, and CDET authorities often criticised the university management and administrative staff for the lack of responsibility and accountability in procedures and tasks. It is necessary, therefore, that they promote a culture of transparency and accountability among the faculty, staff, and administration personnel for the university to function well. The challenge for the university is to create a more positive institutional culture, and encourage the faculty, administrative and support staff to demonstrate the professionalism and integrity, expected and needed. Furthermore, this study also identified that the absence of a proper institutional monitoring mechanism at university and college level is another factor hampering administrative efficiency, and an effective delivery of the distance B.Ed. programme.

Therefore, the study showed that the lack of financial resources, shortage of adequate trained organisational staff, lack of professionalism and integrity, management incompetence, and absence of institutional monitoring are some of the factors responsible for the poor management and administration at BirMet and CDET. UNESCO (2007) points out that improving skills in management, establishing clear norms and transparent procedures and regular institutional monitoring and audits are some of the basic requirements for reducing corruption and ensuring the administrative efficiency of all educational institutions.

### **9.2.5 Student support services and tutorials**

It has been argued that the success of DE system depends largely on student support services provided to its learners (Kumar et al., 2011), and that the nature of student support in DE is determined by philosophy, funding, course delivery system, organisational structures, and the culture in which it operates (McInnis-Rankin and Brindley, 1986; Sewart, 1993). The quality of student support may also depend on the skills and competence of academic and administrative staff. Nevertheless, there has been increasing recognition that distance learners require administrative, academic, and affective or counselling support (McInnis-Rankin and Brindley, 1986; Simpson, 2002; Tait and Mills, 2003) in order to help them to cope with the special demands of DL (Brindley, 1995). Additionally, the roles of local study centres in providing student support have also been considered crucial in DE system (Mills, 1996). Nonetheless, this study found that student support services provided by CDET and its local study centre were not adequate.

Academic support for students at CDET was built into the SLMs and also provided through occasional face-to-face tutorials. However, because of the low quality of the study materials, and poor content organisation and presentation and lack of student-content-interaction, students reported that these materials were poor in terms of supporting them in their learning. Additionally, students and tutors also identified library and learning resources as significant elements in supporting DL, yet unfortunately, such facilities were almost absent at CDET and its local study centres.

This study also found that face-to-face tutorials were long and demotivating, infrequent, and poorly managed. Tutorials rarely provided opportunity for students to communicate their learning needs, or for encouraging student-tutor and student-student interaction (Gunawardena, 2004; Moore, 2007). Tutors relied heavily on lecturing. As described in Chapter Six, although

tutors' communication skills, organisational skills, and content presentation skills, were rated as average, students reported that the academic and administrative support provided was inadequate. Likewise, students perceived that feedback on their work and assignments would help identify weaknesses and areas for development. Nonetheless, because of lack of time, and lack of adequate incentives and payment, part-time 'helmet tutors'<sup>30</sup> were reluctant to provide feedback on students' assignments. It appears that CDET needs to reduce its heavy reliance on end-of-course written examinations, and give emphasis to continuous assessment (e.g., a semester system, assignments for tutorial sessions) so that students get opportunities for feedback and reflection. It seemed that tutors and support staff needed to be exposed to training and skill development opportunities so that they can carry out their roles and responsibilities adequately and provide better support to distance students. Tutors also need training to provide constructive feedback in a timely manner. However, CDET had no proper staff and faculty support, training and development mechanisms in place.

Similarly, although students reported that they found pre-admission counselling and the mandatory orientation sessions very informative and useful for clarifying any concerns prior to making a formal decision to register on the course, they were critical of the inadequacy of administrative support provided to them. However, because of inadequate funding, lack of access to ICT facilities, and shortage of adequate and trained administrative staff, CDET and its study centres were not able to provide dedicated and satisfactory administrative support at

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<sup>30</sup> By this I mean those groups of lecturers/tutors who are mostly employed full-time or part-time at more than one academic institution, and once lectures/tutorials in one institution are over, they seem to be in a hurry so they pick up their 'helmets' and rush to other places on motorbikes.

local level. In section 9.2.4, I have already pointed out some of the issues affecting administrative services at the university level.

Moreover, it appeared that affective or counselling support to overcome personal difficulties was not given a priority at CDET and its study centres. Again, it may be due to existing sociocultural and educational tradition in the country. Although CDET centres had the provision of a resource person (RP), they were not easily accessible and in most cases RPs happened to be the local study centre co-coordinators, and were not trained to provide academic and counselling support. The centre co-ordinators were the contact point and source of information about administrative services such as tutorials dates, viva and examination schedules.

Because of the high cost associated with ICT and an unreliable electricity supply, the use of information communication technology was restricted in Nepal. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Chapter Six, students at CDET perceived the use of computer and internet as being ‘extremely useful’ and considered the use of multimedia, online discussion forums, and the mobile phone as ‘very useful’. Since the number of users of mobile technology such as cell phones is rapidly growing in Nepal, such technology has the potential to increase interaction and communication opportunities, and to deliver better student support (Lunsford, 2010; Kumar et al., 2011). Therefore, this study suggests that mobile phones may be a viable and affordable medium for providing support to students and staff at CDET in Nepal.

Finally, as argued by various scholars (Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap, 2003; McIsaac and Gunawardena, 2000), the formation of learning communities can provide affective or social support and may benefit student teachers at CDET. Although I did not find any recognised learning community of prospective teachers, some of the students at CDET pointed out that they had established an informal learning network for sharing study materials, and exchanging

information, which they considered beneficial in supporting their learning. Such informal learning networks (also possible using mobile technology, or through Facebook apps on mobile devices) are therefore likely to provide opportunity for student-student interaction and help reduce the students' feelings of isolation and frustration. Dueber and Misanchuk (2001) point out that developing a (psychological) sense of belonging to a learning community serves the students as well as the institution, by reducing the feelings of isolation and lowering attrition rate on distance courses.

#### **9.2.6 Facilitators and barriers to distance teacher education**

This study found that the main driving forces facilitating the distance B.Ed. programme at CDET was the energy, determination and motivation of CDET authorities in relation to this provision. However, as discussed in Chapter Eight, their initiatives were hindered mainly by the political, economic and institutional conditions. For example, because of ongoing political instability many aspects of life in Nepal are affected. Due to frequent government and ministerial changes top academic positions in universities are also subject to change, which affects the smooth functioning of such institutions. Closure of educational establishments, disruption of transport systems and businesses is brought about by Banda/strikes due to political agitation and unrest.

Additionally, the poor economic condition affected the development of physical infrastructure and resources, and as this programme did not receive any funding or support from the government, CDET had to rely on student fees for materials production, management of learning resources, payments to faculty, organisational staffing, and other administrative costs.

Additionally, at national and institution level, factors such as the lack of a clear DE policy and implementation framework, poor physical infrastructure and resources, non-existent quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms, and a weak student, and faculty support system inhibited programme effectiveness. A lack of adequate staffing and expertise, poor coordination between CDET and university, incompetent administration and management, and insufficient communication between staff, tutors and students, compounded the situation.

Manjulika and Reddy (1996) report the lack of funding, poor infrastructure and learning resources, lack of clear government policies, limited use of multimedia, lack of expertise for developing DL materials, and low social and academic status of DE as main obstacles for DE system in developing countries. UNESCO (1997) also highlights the following common barriers impeding the effective implementation of DE in developing countries:

- a. Lack of funding, problems of allocation of resources and sustained support
- b. Lack of human resources with sufficient competence and motivation
- c. Technological infrastructure, which prevents the effective use of appropriate technologies
- d. Lack of strategic planning and coordination

As a consequence of these constraints, the facilitating factors were unable to have much bearing and the gap between rhetoric and reality in DE practices in many developing countries has increased (Dhanarajan, 2001).

### **9.3 Some lessons and suggestions**

In light of the above findings, this study highlights the need to address the following aspects in order to strengthen, develop and sustain the distance mode teacher training programme in Nepal.

#### **9.3.1 Political commitment and funding support from government**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the absence of clear-cut national DE policies, and national implementation strategies, seems to have a negative impact on the success and sustainability of the DL programme in Nepal. The existing DE policy in Nepal encompasses three entirely different areas: open schooling, improving the quality of conventional education, and higher education and teacher development through distance mode. Therefore, such type of policy dissonance requires reconsideration as the lack of a comprehensive and coherent policy is likely to have a negative effect on the sustainable development and expansion of DE system for teacher training in Nepal. Likewise, the way in which the private, or non-government sector can be involved in providing higher education and training through distance mode, the capacity in which they would operate, and how they would be supported by the government, has not been clarified by the policy. In this regard, the first step to express the government's commitment in support of DE initiatives could be to formulate explicit policies and national implementation strategies, and to clarify the role the government can play in expanding teacher education through distance mode.

Additionally, students, tutors and founder members also pointed out that DE efforts in Nepal suffers a lack of sustained political good will and commitment on the part of the government. Although, more than a decade ago, the Nepal government articulated a vision for an Open University in order to increase access to higher education and teacher training, yet no initiatives



have been taken to establish such an Open University. Moreover, the government outlined a vision for DE at policy level, but due to the frequent changes in government and lack of committed political leadership, the government's vision is still confined to a policy document. Hence, in order to establish an Open University in Nepal, there seems to be a need for a strong political will of decision-makers and bureaucrats at the top. Furthermore, political leadership is required to express a commitment to forge consensus in maintaining political stability, and in creating an enabling environment for the development of a DE system in the country. However, the prevailing political conditions are not conducive to education and training advancement through distance mode in Nepal. At the moment, regular Banda strikes and demands to provide donations or financial support to political parties seem to have negatively affected the functioning of CDET/BirMet as well as the growth and expansion of the distance teacher education system in Nepal.

The infrastructure needed for DE system, curriculum materials and human resources development, requires a heavy initial cost. Because of the lack of sufficient funds, CDET was not able to develop the necessary infrastructure, therefore, tutors and founder members identified that a strong national strategy for implementation, and financial support from the government, is essential for the infrastructure development, and for the growth and sustainability of DE system in Nepal.

### **9.3.2 Use of ICT**

As stated in Chapter Six, students reported that the use of ICT and mobile devices could facilitate distance teaching and learning in an effective way. As pointed out earlier, the majority of students and tutors at CDET lacked access to ICT, apart from the use of mobile phone. The use of computers and internet was constrained by the lack of access, high purchase costs, and an unreliable electricity supply. In this regard, use of mobile technology such as cell phones

seems to be a way forward to facilitate distance learning and teaching. Scholars have argued that mobile technology has the potential to empower distance learning and teaching, as well as faculty development and training (Engel et al., 2011; Palloff et al., 2012; Power and Shrestha, 2009). Lunsford (2010) also found that mobile technology can be used:

- for communication between staff and students;
- to personalise a student's support within the context of their chosen course;
- for group cohesion within study groups or other learning communities;
- to encourage students to share their thoughts and expertise with other students;
- to prompt participation in on-going forums or other discussions;
- to introduce and suggest new material, news or events;
- for revision, review and rehearsal of learned material;
- to introduce and support meta-cognitive aspects of learning how to learn; to positively reinforce a student's perception of their learning progress; and
- as reminders of what tasks or options are due, for both courses and administration

Furthermore, Kajumbula (2009) found that use of mobile technology, particularly SMS was significant in facilitating communication among students, tutors and administrators and in reducing the isolation felt by learners on a DL course. Additionally, the study revealed that tutors and administrators felt that the use of SMS can enhance academic and administrative support. Another study also reports that mobile learning via SMS has the potential to reduce the transactional distance, to enable DE institutions to reach out to learners outside of conventional communication spaces, and to keep learners connected to the university, their peers, and their tutors (Lim et al., 2011). In this regard, in Nepal where access to computer and internet is limited, the power supply is unreliable, landline telephone is not available to most

of the population but the use of cell phones are rapidly increasing , the use of mobile technology could be a viable option to facilitate and support teaching and learning at a distance.

### **9.3.3 Staffing, staff development and training**

This study identified that CDET and its local study centres lacked adequate staffing. Therefore, in order to ensure efficient administrative functioning, raise the quality of academic and support services, it appeared that CDET and BirMet need to recruit adequate organisational staffing. Additionally, this study revealed that administrative staff and tutors involved in the programme had not received appropriate training in teaching and supporting distance learners. Although faculty and staff support and development has been considered an important component to ensuring long-term success in DE (Willis, 1993), no such development and support provision was found at CDET. Faculty, administrative and support staff require specialised skills, abilities, and training to understand the learning needs of and provide appropriate support to distance learners. Although, CDET authorities and local study centre co-ordinators reported that a few training workshops were organised at local level, due to the lack of funding, shortage of experts and lack of time, training activities had been discontinued. It also seems that providing financial rewards and incentives to tutors, administrative and support staff, was likely to encourage them to carry out their roles and responsibilities more effectively. Where possible, CDET and the university need to encourage and facilitate members of the faculty to engage in research and publications, and to attend workshops and conferences so that they can develop their expertise and skills and become aware of issues concerning distance teaching and learning. Tutors in this study also stressed that teaching, administrative and support staff need to be visit established DE institutions. They perceived that such opportunities would help them share experiences and gain a better understanding of DE practices. More importantly, it seems essential that the university and CDET should focus on increasing organisational staffing,

capacity building, staff development and support by establishing appropriate mechanisms that foster continuous professional development, which in turn would help enhance and raise the standards and quality of its academic programmes.

#### **9.3.4 Collaborative partnerships**

Collaboration and partnerships with public-private institutions, government and non-government organisations, and overseas DE institutions appear to be crucial in order to enhance institutional capacity, strengthen DE initiatives and maintain the quality of distance teacher education programmes in an under-resourced and developing context like Nepal. Tutors and founder members also identified this need for the sharing of resources, scholarship, and expertise. Collaborative partnerships can be formed in various areas such as in developing new courses, developing or adapting course materials, strengthening infrastructure and learning facilities, enhancing student support services, human resource development, collaborating in research, and organising workshops and seminars. It has been argued that:

*With collaboration, the cost of a particular initiative to any one institution, agency, or country is minimised and the quality of the finished product can be higher than if only one institution or country undertook the development of the learning materials.*

(Wright et al., 2009)

Additionally, CDET could collaborate with internal education institutions so that constituent and affiliated campuses of TU, and Education Training Centres (ETCs) of NCED could be used as contact or local study centres. Doing this would help increase the access to teacher education opportunities to most districts in Nepal.

### **9.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation**

Regular monitoring and evaluation may help determine, maintain, and improve the overall standards of educational programmes, curriculum and study materials, infrastructure and facilities, administration and management, human resources and staffing, tutorial and learning activities, student assessment, course delivery methods, student support services and financial management. However, such mechanisms did not exist at CDET. CDET needs to make sure that contact session activities, staff performance, and attendance of students are monitored regularly. This study, therefore, highlights the need for internal quality assurance mechanisms to carry out self-assessment of institutional activities as well as to monitor and evaluate programme performance.

### **9.3.6 Suggestions and recommendations**

In the light of the discussions above, this study recommends that the government should work to:

- formulate clear DE policies, and strategic planning and establish appropriate mechanisms that will materialise the policies into concrete action;
- provide an appropriate level of government funding and support for DE providers to reassure their initiatives;
- create a conducive environment in which distance teacher education institutions can grow and flourish
- minimise all forms of political interference in educational institutions;
- mobilise the University Grants Commission, or establish appropriate regulatory mechanisms to ensure the standards and quality of DE institutions and their programmes;

- promote the importance of DL for teacher training and for gaining other qualifications in a geographically diverse, post-conflict, and politically unstable national context;
- develop innovative schemes to draw upon the support and to establish collaborative partnerships with national and international DE institutions to share expertise, resources, and good practices

Similarly, the university and CDET should:

- demonstrate a high level of institutional commitment, particularly by the university, to achieve its mission, goals and objectives;
- carry out a regular review of the curriculum and SLMs to make sure that they are up-to-date, comprehensive, and cater for the needs of distance learners;
- ensure appropriate physical facilities, technological infrastructure, and library and learning resources to enhance distance teaching and learning;
- establish necessary organisational structures and mechanisms to ensure smooth functioning of CDET and the university;
- ensure clear norms, transparent administrative procedures and regulations for decision-making;
- recruit adequate staffing; and ensure efficient and accountable management and responsible administrative system;
- maintain regular communication, good coordination and cooperation between the university, the college and its study centres;
- where possible, integrate ICT into the course delivery, instruction, administrative services , and for student support
- conduct face-to-face tutorials more frequently, make them student-centred, with ample opportunities provided to foster student-tutor, and student-student interactions;

- ensure availability of appropriate academic, administrative and counselling support services to reduce the feelings of isolation, frustration, and enhance DL experiences;
- encourage the formation and development of student teachers' community of practice or learning network, and encourage prospective teachers to participate in such community or network;
- reduce over-reliance on end-of-course examinations and employ continuous assessment strategies which allow distance students to check their learning and progress, and also to receive feedback from their tutors regularly;
- establish appropriate support, training and appraisal mechanisms for the professional development of tutors and staff;
- provide better pay and promotion prospects to tutors and staff in order to encourage and motivate them in their roles;
- establish appropriate mechanism for internal institutional monitoring, and for quality assessment and improvement of the B.Ed. programme;
- encourage research, and reinforce the links between research and distance teaching and learning to strengthen the programme.

## **9.4 Limitations of the research**

While this study is important in analysing DE practices in a developing context, there are certain limitations of this research. One limitation is small sample size. My study was limited to interviews with four tutors, and 13 students. Although I was willing to carry-out interviews with as many tutors as possible, some tutors refused to participate in interviews citing their inadequate experiences of tutoring distance learners and I only managed to interview four tutors. Therefore, tutors from Butwal centres were not included in this research. Moreover, one of the CDET centres was not accessible due to constant political unrest in the southern part of

Nepal. As pointed out in Chapter Four, even while travelling to the rest of the centres, I had to be flexible and learn to adapt to unforeseen political events. Frequent Banda and strikes and political unrest impeded travel and made it difficult to collect systematic data from CDET centres consistently.

In addition, analysis of data in relation to age, gender and centre location may have provided different insights into data interpretations. But, participants were not requested to provide information on age, and as students were mature adults, I did not consider age difference as an important factor. Similarly, since the number of female students in the course was significantly low, and only two female participants (one from the previous academic year, and one undertaking the course during the time of my fieldwork) were available for interviews, I did not analyse the data based on gender differences. I also did not consider analysis by centre as an important factor, as most of the CDET centres exhibited similar characteristics, in terms of infrastructure and learning responses, staffing, management, and the way contact session activities were conducted. Given the exploratory nature of this qualitative case study research, I did not attempt to quantify in terms of age, gender and local differences.

Furthermore, although experiences and perspectives of ‘failed’ or ‘drop-out’ students, and BirMet University administration, would have helped to uncover further issues and concerns, I was unable to recruit these groups for interview. CDET did not have clear data on ‘failed’ or ‘drop-out’ students but I was told by CDET authorities that clear data would be available once the university announced re-examination dates and received completed forms from these groups of students. Even so, till the end of my fieldwork, a re-examination notice had not been published. Therefore, although I tried to locate “hard-to-reach” groups of potential students (Lichtman, 2010, p. 43) using network and snowball sampling, my attempt was unsuccessful.



Additionally, the university administration refused my request to take part in the interviews citing their busy schedules.

As already stated in Chapter Three, the selection of case study design brings forth generalisation of the findings as one of the limitations. It is important to note, however that the purpose of this research was to accumulate empirical evidence to advance readers' understanding of DE practices in a developing context and not to seek to claim wider generalisations. Nonetheless, this study may resonate with the experiences of people involved in distance teacher education programme in a developmental and under-resourced context. The importance of case study research lies in its resonance dimensions, in its "extension of experience" (Stake, 1995, p. 460), or transferability<sup>31</sup> of findings to similar developmental contexts (O'Leary, 2004).

While I believe that the research provides deeper insights into the teacher education through distance mode in a politically unstable and under-resourced context more generally, and enhances readers' understanding about the issues and challenges faced by students, tutors and staff operating in a developmental context, there is clearly scope for further work in this area.

## **9.5 Contributions to the field**

One of the major achievements of this study is its contribution to a better understanding of DE in a politically unstable, under-resourced and developing context, such as Nepal. This case study has contributed to new knowledge by extending understanding of the experiences,

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<sup>31</sup> It refers to the extent to which 'lesson learned' is likely to be applicable to other contexts, settings or groups. It relates to the adequacy of description provided by the researchers about the 'research setting and methods so that determination regarding applicability can be made by those reading the research account' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 63)

perspectives, and challenges faced by students and tutors involved in the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal. In order to gain a fuller picture, this study emphasises the need to recognise national and institutional contexts in which DE is embedded. This research reveals how factors such as DE policy related, socio-political, financial resources, and institutional conditions, and DE initiatives are inextricably interconnected, and attempts to illuminate how these factors and contextual complexities determine the success and sustainability of the distance teacher education programme in Nepal.

I also consider that this study has particular importance because there has been little empirical study regarding the teacher education programme through distance mode Nepal. Although studies were carried out during the 1990s on Nepal's Radio Teacher Education (Holmes et al., 1991, 1993), this research is significant in the sense that it is possibly the first study ever carried out for measuring the effectiveness of the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal, and currently, CDET is the sole institution delivering teacher education at a distance in the entire country. I consider that this research has made a unique contribution in the field of teacher education through distance mode by exploring its effectiveness in Nepal.

Additionally, from the literature I reviewed in Chapter Three, I built up a new conceptual framework in order to explore the distance B.Ed. programme, which may serve as a heuristic tool for researchers and practitioners involved in teacher education through distance mode.

The study elucidates and brings to lights the issues, challenges and prospects of DE in Nepal. This study has identified several key factors that facilitate and hinder DE initiatives in Nepal (cf. Chapter Eight, section 8.4), which I believe help enrich readers' understanding of DE practices in low-resource and developing contexts. I believe that the findings of the study can serve as guidelines for policy planners, decision makers, course designers, teacher educators

and practitioners involved in planning, developing and implementing DE programmes in politically unstable, under-resourced and developmental contexts.

## **9.6 Areas for further research**

The conclusions and the limitations of this study also indicate some directions for future research. One possible avenue would be to explore the link between knowledge and skills emphasised in and covered by the distance B.Ed. course, and the knowledge and skills required for teachers in order to enable them to effectively function in the Nepalese school classroom (Banks et al., 2005; Owen-Jackson, 2008). This would help identify the impact of the teacher education programme on (student) teachers' classroom practice. NCED (2007) found that the link between school classroom practice and pre-service or teacher preparation courses was poor. Although, my questionnaires contained some questions about student teachers' professional knowledge, because of the fact that a majority of students were not taking the course to develop their career in teaching, but for job promotion, I decided not to continue with the idea of exploring teachers professional knowledge in the Nepalese context. Therefore, the relationship between teacher preparation courses, teachers' professional knowledge, and subsequent classroom practice could be an important to explore in further research.

Furthermore, since the focus of this study was not on cost-efficiency, this study cannot make any claim about whether the teacher training through distance mode or conventional campus-based system are cost-effective in Nepal. However, further studies can be undertaken to compare the cost of campus-based pre-service teacher education programmes with the costs of distance teacher preparation programmes in Nepal.

As illustrated in Chapter Six, some of the students found informal learning circles useful in supporting DL. Therefore, another avenue for further research lies in exploring whether or not

the formation of a prospective teachers' community of practice (PTCoP) can maximise opportunities for student-student interaction, the creation and sharing of experiences and resources, and the enhancing of DL in a developmental context.

Further research is also needed to investigate the roles and responsibilities of tutors in supporting distance students, and how they can be enabled to enact their roles and responsibilities effectively. Students on the distance B.Ed. course expected academic, and effective or personal support from the tutors. However, tutors were employed part-time, were very busy with other institutions and were not provided with training, and support themselves, on how to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively, and on how they could efficiently deliver support to distance students. Therefore, further research could focus on how tutors can be enabled to enact their roles and responsibilities effectively and deliver appropriate student support in an institutional context severely lacking infrastructure, resources and facilities.

Last but not least, further research is needed to explore whether or not the uses of ICT, particularly the use of cell phones, would improve the educational experiences of distance learning and teaching, student support and faculty development in Nepal.

## **9.7 Concluding remarks**

This study has explored the use of distance mode in teacher preparation and training at CDET in Nepal. Currently, CDET is the sole institution in the entire country offering teacher education courses. In this regard, CDET's endeavours to increase and widen education opportunities to prospective teachers should be appreciated, particularly in a context where the government itself has not been able to initiate, facilitate or coordinate such attempts. In a country like Nepal, where education initiatives are constrained by severe resource limitations

and political instability, the development of an effective DE system for teacher development and training is certainly full of challenges.

This research journey has not only enriched and enhanced my understanding of research skills and the research process, but also helped me gain a deeper understanding of the distance teacher education programme in Nepal. As described in Chapter Four, although my research fieldwork was full of anxieties, uncertainties, and challenges, and at times difficult to cope with for me as a novice researcher, the process of undertaking this academic research project has been a personally rewarding one, and a valuable learning experience. This research has provided a unique opportunity for me to experience DE practices in a low-income and under-resourced context, and to explore contextual complexities and factors hindering DE initiatives. I became familiar with the issues and challenges, and personally experienced some of the problems shared by tutors as well as students in Nepal, such as the impact of political instability and Banda, lack of regular power supply and lack of resources. My field experiences helped uncover contextual complexities and helped me understand how students and tutors were making sense of their experiences of distance teacher education programme and what influenced their behaviour and decision-making. This research has contributed to raising the understanding and awareness of teacher education through distance mode in Nepal. I have learned, in the course of the project, that without adequate resources (financial, physical, technological, educational and human), support from government and /or collaborative partners, political stability and/or commitment, and institutional commitment, sustainability of distance education systems in Nepal cannot be ensured.

Although I do not claim that this research would lead to DE policy change, or determine DE policy in Nepal, I do feel that one of the outcomes of this research is to 'inform' DE policy decision making. As discussed in Chapter Eight, this research identified national and

institutional factors impeding the growth, quality and sustainability of the distance B.Ed. programme in Nepal. I consider that the success of the distance training programme in Nepal lies in how well the government, programme planners and the DE institutions reflect upon these national and institutional factors as well as suggestions made by this study. This research can provide useful input for the planning, developing and implementing of DE programmes in Nepal in future. This study provides a pathway for reconceptualisation of the B.Ed. programme conducted through distance mode, and also has potential for informing and improving DE practices in Nepal.

Apart from developing skills and capability as a researcher and gaining deeper insights into the experiences of the distance B.Ed. programme, I believe that this research experience is equally significant to my future academic and professional career. While undertaking a literature review on DE, I have acquired comprehensive knowledge about the theories of DE as well as the use of distance mode for teacher education and training, which enabled me to devise a new framework for exploring DE in Nepal. Similarly, while carrying out this research, as already discussed, I identified several issues pertaining to the distance B.Ed. programme at CDET, and recognised the complex interrelationship among the factors underlying these problems. I consider that sustained political will and government support, a conducive political environment, adequate funding resources, integration of ICT, qualified and competent staff, collaborative partnerships, and quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms are essential in order to enable the DE institutions to function efficiently as well as to ensure the quality and standards of distance teacher education programmes in a developing country like Nepal.

On my return to Nepal, I would like to use my experience, knowledge and expertise gained so far in support of DE in Nepal in general, and for reforming teacher education programmes in order to improve classroom practice in particular. In recent years, students' performances in

School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations, known as the ‘iron gate’ of school education in Nepal, continue to be poor. For example, according to the Ministry of Education, in the academic year 2010/11, 55.5% of the students, who appeared SLC examination, passed the examination whereas in the academic year 2011/12 53.9% failed the examination. I consider that by linking teacher education courses to Nepalese school classroom practice, by enhancing teachers’ professional competence, and by addressing the critical aspects of the classroom (e.g., school structure, learning environment, curriculum, resources, facilities, and assessment system), student performances in the SLC examination can be improved. As described in Chapter Two, although the Nepal government has started a long-term strategic plan, the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP, 2009-2015), its impact on school and student performance is yet to be seen.

In this regard, for me, one of the steps towards making a contribution to producing qualified and competent teachers, and for the improvement of classroom practice, would be to become directly involved in teacher education programmes as well as to engage in further research. In order for the improvement to happen, it is important to build a research culture as a basis for informed decision. For this reason, I would like to take a role in a teacher education programme as well as in researching the effectiveness of such a programme in informing and improving classroom practice.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Nepal government has proposed that all teacher training courses would be delivered via distance mode, and that a ‘Professional M.Ed.’ DL course would be developed for upgrading the qualification of serving teachers in order to enable them to meet the new qualification criteria set by School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP). The government also intends to establish an Open University in Nepal, although this has yet to

materialise. My research, my experiences and the knowledge would provide valuable input in this regard.



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